

The Early Christian Church

I. Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Church

The Universal Church.—Jesus Christ is the founder of the universal church; first, in the sense that it is the whole assembly or family of God, stretching from Adam to the second coming of the Lord; and second, in the particular sense of the church since His incarnation. It is in the second of these senses that the church universal is considered here.

Jesus Christ did not come in the unspeakable glory of Deity to found the Christian church. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), and therefore was gravely misunderstood. Neither did He come in the panoply of human royalty. He came rather as a plain man of the people, thereby disappointing the Jews, to whom the coming of the Messiah was to be a greater occasion than any ever before seen.

The Messiah.—Yet Jesus Christ was the Messiah. The Jews did not understand the twin truths (1) that the Messiah must be Himself God, and (2) that there must be, in the nature of things, two comings of the Messiah. The first advent must give the Messiah opportunity to condemn “sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3), and to “taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). The second advent must be in the triumph of the glory of heaven, to gather in the fruitage of the labors the church should perform in the Holy Spirit through the centuries of time that must separate the two grand appearances of the Lord. At His first coming Christ fulfilled perfectly the Messianic prophecies. This He set forth from Isaiah (ch. 61:1, 2^a) in His declaration on a stirring Sabbath in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–22). By ending the reading where He did, He separated the saving work of the first coming from that of “the day of vengeance of our God” (Isa. 61:2^b), not to be accomplished until the second advent (DA 240, 241).

The Teacher.—Jesus came to teach. He taught primarily by the example of an unsullied life. While He lived thus blamelessly, there fell from His lips words of truth, uttered in simplicity, that reached the minds of the most unfortunate, the most darkened sinners; even the demon-possessed heard His words. He taught also in parables for those who might wish to delve and analyze, but He left such to choose frustration if they cared to let their thinking be less than clear and open-minded. “I thank thee ... because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25).

The Revelation of God.—The pagans feared their gods—those they still believed in—and placated them with hecatombs and holocausts. The Jews, conscious of their shortcomings, had come to see God, not as the Creator-Father that He is, but as an offended Deity, seeking opportunity to avenge Himself upon the disobedient. They thought they could placate Him with a strict regimen of living, a binding and restricting legalism, a public show of religiosity. Their conscience demanded that they seek to gain His divine favor by the endless round of sacrifices required by the law, but the search was frustrated by the lack of spirituality in their own hearts. They sought to offer to God a righteousness of their own making.

Jesus came, not to show what God is like in respect to His power and His visible glory, but to show the people those attributes proclaimed to Moses in the mount (Ex. 33:18 to 34:9)—wisdom, mercy, and righteousness, and the all-inclusive attribute of love. This revelation God, and He alone, could and would give to men who had so far departed

from Him that they could not endure the blazing effulgence of His glory. Righteousness must come from God.

So Jesus manifested the kindly love and the other quiet virtues of the gracious character of a tender and merciful Father. He talked of glory, and He spoke of doom, but He emphasized the joy of the Lord and the beauty of holiness. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:6, 9). Not the visible glory—not yet—but everything else that He could set forth of God while in human frame, was lived and taught by Jesus.

The Work.—With His deity veiled by humanity, Jesus performed great miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit. He raised the dead; He healed the sick; He stilled the tumults of nature; He rebuked and exorcised demons, casting them out of men's lives as once before He had cast them out of heaven. He fed the hungry bodies of men by a miraculous multiplication of bread and fish, as He fed their souls through the multiplication of spiritual truths.

He worked quietly, without undue show. Constantly misunderstood, often maligned, He showed caution, frequently bidding the beneficiaries of His goodness not to reveal who had helped them. But His work was nonetheless publicly done, and could but attract attention.

The Public Gospel.—It had to be thus. The people must know Jesus' cause and His message. They must be drawn to Him. And they were. Not only twelve, but seventy, put themselves directly under His leadership, and there were times when thousands followed Him about.

The witness was closed in Judea. The Samaritans would not hear, because "his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:53). In Galilee He preached and worked again and again, but in Nazareth itself and other places the people refused His ministry.

As the time drew near for the close of His ministry on earth, He permitted more and more attention to be drawn to Himself. The hill of Calvary was looming on the horizon of time, and the people must be watching when He should climb that little mountain to die upon the cross. He fed five thousand, besides women and children, and again four thousand, while His disciples were hoping that He might be made king. When He raised Lazarus from the dead, the whole countryside knew of it. He rode triumphantly into Jerusalem while the common people hailed Him, and again a royal crown was in the disciples' minds. When the end came all Jewry knew of it.

The Church.—For a founder of a movement, Jesus said little enough for posterity to read about His church. But He founded one. The gospel writer put into His mouth the word *ekklēsia*, translated "church," and meaning very literally, "called out"; it has the sense of "called out and gathered." It was the name used for the popular assemblies in the government of Greek city-states. In the LXX it takes on a religious meaning as the "congregation" of Israel, and in the New Testament it is applied to the spiritual assembly of the saints of Christ. The wellcity-statesknit fellowship that made of the church an organization can be seen as Christ committed to it a program of service.

Christ said that He would build His church, and that it would be built through men of sincere faith in Himself as the Son of God, men who would confess His name (Matt. 16:15–19). This would necessarily involve the teaching mission, and the resulting

acceptance into fellowship of those who would hear the word preached. Into His general teachings He wove the details of the process of forming the church.

However, the church was to possess authority. The member of the assembly of saints who would refuse opportunity to be reconciled to his brethren must be expelled, and the expulsion should occur with the approval of Heaven itself and in line with Heaven's decisions (Matt. 18:15–18).

The Gospel Commission.—Before the close of His earthly experience, Jesus laid upon His disciples the task of a great commission, the accomplishment of which would take them into all the world. The disciples must teach the gospel message and perform baptism as an initiatory service for each one who should come into the church. Instruction in the will and words of Christ must, of course, go with the baptizing by which the church marked its new members. To illustrate the work and to familiarize the disciples with it, Christ sent out, first twelve, then seventy, two by two. They were permitted a minimum of equipment, but a maximum of spiritual power.

The sending out of these men could not have been hit or miss, for Jesus was a man of order. Indeed, on the resurrection morning, before Jesus reported to His Father, He paused to put His graveclothes in order (John 20:5–7). The sending out of the Twelve and the Seventy, and the plan of the Great Commission itself, could have been prosecuted only in good order and method. The church was founded in system and organization.

The Close of Jesus' Ministry.—Jealousy of Christ, on the part of the leaders, and misunderstanding of the status and work of the Messiah, on the part of the people, finally reached a climax. The Jews insisted that the Romans should crucify Him. A timeserving, political-minded Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, complied. He sought to wash his hands of responsibility in the matter, but no water could remove his guilt. The Jews took the responsibility upon themselves by their fearful declaration, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27:25).

The Vicarious Atonement.—Speculation is unnecessary as to who, whether the Jews or the Romans, caused the death of Christ. For "he was wounded [or, "tormented"] for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5); "who his own self bare [or, "carried up"] our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). Ever in the mind of God had been the plan He had arranged for meeting sin: that His Son should live sinless on earth, thus proving that His law could be kept; and that He should die, though innocent, and condemn "sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3), fulfilling the meaning of the Old Testament sacrifices and showing that there must be death for the breaking of the law. Ever in the mind of Christ was compliance with this counsel, and therefore He was incarnated, lived blamelessly, and set an example which in His power all might follow (1 Peter 2:21–23). He tasted "death for every man" (Heb. 2:9), taking upon Himself in vicarious atonement the sins of all who should accept "so great salvation" (v. 3). He died as though He were Himself a sinner, exchanging His righteousness, freely given, for the sins of men, ungrudgingly received, and His life for the sinner's death, uncomplainingly accepted (2 Cor. 5:21). "Remove this cup from me," He prayed; "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

There is no need to assign divided guilt to Caiaphas, Herod, or Pilate! *Sin*, which controlled them all, killed Christ, when in the thick darkness on the cross He experienced separation from the Father (Matt. 27:46), and died of a broken heart (John 19:34, 35). He died for us.

The Resurrection.—“The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). But death could not hold the Lord (Acts 2:24): because He had divine life in Himself (John 5:26; 10:17, 18; DA 530); because the Father called Him (Matt. 28:2–4; DA 780, 785); and because, since He was Himself sinless (1 Peter 2:22), death had no claim upon Him.

When He arose, having tasted death for every man and having been victorious over the tomb, He provided life for every man. “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). So complete and efficient was the victory of Christ, the Sinless One, over death, that His resurrection became the theme of the apostolic church, and Paul, looking forward to the second advent, exclaimed “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55). Life, the gift of Christ to Adam in creation, became now again His particular gift, offered freely to every child of Adam, who, otherwise doomed to death, could accept life from the risen Saviour (Rom. 5:10; 8:11).

The Forty Days.—During the forty days following the resurrection, Christ made Himself available to the disciples, occasionally meeting with them. Mary, who greeted Him in the garden early on the resurrection morning, was not permitted to touch Him until He had ascended to the Father. A little while later, having made His way to heaven and returned, Christ accepted graciously the reverent touch of the women. (John 20:16, 17; Matt. 28:9; DA 789–793.) He also met Peter (1 Cor. 15:5).

Toward the end of the day He walked with two disciples, not of the Twelve, as they returned home to Emmaus from Jerusalem. Deeply troubled, they listened while Jesus, His identity concealed, showed from the Scriptures that it behooved “Christ to have suffered these things” (Luke 24:26). Comforted, and curious as to the identity of this seeming Stranger, they invited Him to sup with them. As He was giving thanks He permitted them to know Him by the nailprints in His hands (Luke 24:31; DA 800). At that moment, for reasons He knew best, He disappeared from view, but did not absent Himself. The two disciples hastened to Jerusalem to tell the brethren there that they had seen the Lord. Unseen, Christ accompanied them back to Jerusalem (DA 801).

The sun had now set and the moon was rising. The two from Emmaus reached the upper room where the disciples were gathered for “fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). They knocked at the door, and it was cautiously opened to them. As they entered, Jesus also entered, unseen (DA 802). Then He made Himself visible and reassured His followers.

He made other appearances. A week later He showed Himself again, and Thomas, who had not been present at the previous appearance, was convinced that his Lord had risen (John 20:24–29).

Then came for the disciples a time of waiting. They returned to Galilee, and Peter said very practically, “I go a fishing” (John 21:3). Six of the disciples joined him. They fished all night with no results. In the morning a Stranger on the beach commanded them to cast on the right side of their boats, and so heavy was the catch that they could not take it in. John identified the Lord, and Peter waded ashore to worship Him. Later these men were to catch huge draughts in the gospel net by the same divine power that furnished the remarkable catch of fish.

Again Jesus appeared to the Eleven in Galilee (Matt. 28:16, 17). He met with a company of five hundred believers (1 Cor. 15:6). He showed Himself to James (v. 7). Then He returned to Jerusalem and met with the disciples there (v. 7). At Jerusalem, Christ gave to the Eleven the gospel commission:

1. *To go into all the world.* The failure of the Hebrew chosen people to be a nation of priests, ministering the truth of God to the world (Ex. 19:6; PP 369–373), was to be corrected by the church (1 Peter 2:9).

2. *To instruct.* The work of the church was to be basically a teaching mission. The matter of the teaching was to be what Jesus taught (Matt. 28:20), based, as He based His teaching, on the revelation of God in the Old Testament (Luke 24:27, 44). To suppose, as some profess to do, that Jesus gave to the church during the forty days a body of instruction not recorded in Scripture, which gives authority to every practice that emerges in any segment of the church in later years, is to adopt in its totality the theory of the “traditional” church. To do so removes any definitive boundaries from the body of Christ’s revealed teachings and provides a wide-open area for placing under the supposed aegis of Christ’s teaching doctrines and practices for which there is only human authority.

3. *To baptize into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit the converts gained.* Here again emerges the church as it was in Jesus’ thinking. There must be a church to implement the commission; there must be a church to incorporate the results of the execution of the commission. Baptism, the initiatory rite for converts, was to illustrate and make functional the motives Jesus had in being Himself baptized, and by immersion to express the meaning of death to the old life and resurrection into the new life.

Then Christ, about to leave the disciples, promised them His continuing fellowship. Always He would be with them, from that moment until the end of the age, an end which the ascension angels would shortly define as the moment of Christ’s return.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit.—The Lord told them, “Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). They must await the gift of divine power. They must not attempt so formidable a task as world evangelization in their own pitiful insufficiency and weakness. When the power should come, they must go, but not until then.

The disciples had already experienced the Holy Spirit’s presence and something of His power. The Spirit had been the moving force in the work of their incarnated Lord (Luke 2:27; 4:1, 18). Without the Spirit, the disciples could not have done the great things performed on the missionary tours they had conducted under Christ’s supervision. But they had had a remarkable experience in the upper room with Christ on the night following His resurrection. He had breathed upon them, and the Holy Spirit had come unto them (John 20:22). What joy must have been theirs, what a thrill must have resulted, electric in its effect on them, as the Divine Presence entered every fiber of their beings! Thus they must have understood something of the significance of Christ’s instructions to tarry, that the power of the Spirit might come upon them in fullness.

With the inbreathing of the Spirit came a promise of spiritual authority. As the church performed on earth the work of preparing men for heaven, the Spirit of God on earth would cooperate with heaven. The acceptance or rejection of candidates for heaven, when directed by the all-pervading Spirit, would affect both earthly and heavenly registers (John 20:23). To claim the promised power of the Spirit without evidence of the Spirit’s presence and control is ecclesiastical presumption.

The Ascension.—After promising the Spirit’s power, Jesus led His followers out upon the Mount of Olives, whence He was taken up into heaven. As the disciples watched Him ascend, their feeling of sorrow at the separation must have been far different from the grief and frustration they had experienced at the cross. They knew

now, because of the resurrection, that Jesus had the power of life. They understood now from Jesus' instruction what His death had meant (Luke 24:25–27). They had a pledge of power that would be fulfilled through the Spirit by the heavenly Father Himself.

The Promise of the Second Advent.—A further assurance was given them when Jesus disappeared from their view. “This same Jesus,” said angels who stood on the spot from which Jesus had ascended, “shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Upon this definite threefold pledge the disciples could and did build a hope for the future: (1) He would come again; (2) He would be the very same Jesus, the One whom they had known and loved on earth, who would come again; (3) He would come as they had seen Him go, visible to everyone, not secretly or uncertainly. All this was a dramatic and reassuring renewal of what Jesus Himself had told them a few days before the crucifixion (Matt. 24:27).

II. The Emergence of the Church

The Day of Pentecost.—All the events that had occurred thus far were needed for establishing the church on earth as an instrument in God's hands. The one thing indispensable, the power, came at the close of the waiting period Christ had defined, a period of ten days in which the disciples had intimate fellowship with one another and with their Lord through prayer. On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection day, when Christ the first fruits had been offered (Lev. 23:15, 16), the Spirit of God was poured out, and the church was inaugurated.

There was a sensory side to the coming of the Spirit. The sound of His coming was as the sound of a mighty wind borne along, sufficiently loud to draw crowds of people from different parts of the city to the place where the disciples were. The disciples, all 120 of them, gathered together, saw resting upon one another the appearance of fire. The Spirit filled the building and each one of the disciples (Acts 2:2–4).

The infilling of the Spirit was permanent; the effects, immediate. The disciples were drawn together in a corporate self-consciousness they had not before felt. They had a gift of courage in complete contrast with “fear of the Jews,” which had kept them cowering together on the day of the resurrection (John 20:19), a courage which enabled them to step forth and face the very Jews who had crucified their Lord and driven them into hiding. This was a power that produced results vastly different from those that were possible through forces latent within themselves.

The Gift of Tongues.—The apostles preached, supernaturally aided by the gift of tongues. Later they were to learn more concerning gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1–11; Rom. 12:6–8; Eph. 4:11, 12). On the day of Pentecost they received a gift sorely needed on this festival day of witnessing, when so many diverse dialects were being spoken in the city. They received the gift of tongues. Peter's speech was the most noteworthy. At the end of the day, three thousand earnest seekers for salvation were baptized. See The Diaspora.

The Emergent Church.—This day's events formed a vital part of the church's history. Now the groundwork was laid. Now the newborn church was equipped spiritually and psychologically for its tasks. What followed was the organizational filling in and the operational extension of a noble and efficient beginning.

Christ the High Priest.—Christ, the Author of salvation, had made His sacrifice, and had achieved complete victory. He had proved His qualifications to be High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary by His conquest of sin and by His victory over death. The Captain of

our salvation had been made “perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). He who was the offering for sin (Heb. 9:11–14) had become the priestly offerer of His own blood on the sinner’s behalf (chs. 8:1, 2; 9:23–28) at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7:56; Heb. 10:11, 12). He ministered atoning grace on behalf of sinners (Heb. 10:19–22). See Heb. 12:1, 2; DA 819.

The priests of the pagan religions had never been valid intercessors. Theirs was not only a usurpation but a falsification of the great truth of intercession between God and the sinner. With Christ’s assumption of the high priesthood, to which His church witnessed, the vanity and falsity of the old pagan system of priesthood and its sacrifices were most fully revealed.

But the priesthood of the Hebrew economy also must now come to an end. It had served a magnificent purpose until Christ the High Priest, having made His preparation on earth, entered into His sacred work above. The typical priesthood, and the typical sacrifices which that priesthood offered, no longer had any place. The shadow must give way to reality.

More than this, there would be no longer any place for a priesthood on earth among men. Dedicated and well-instructed men had failed in representing adequately the priesthood of Christ prior to the cross. It would be impossible, as well as unnecessary, for any man to make the intercession necessary between God and men after the cross. With Christ as priest in the heavenly sanctuary it would be impossible for any man, no matter how sincere his purpose might be or how lofty his claims, to be priest on earth.

Relationship With the Jewish Church.—The disciples did not separate from the Jewish church. They considered themselves a reforming element that would revamp and revitalize the older, decadent body. Converts, the apostles thought, would find a specialized loyalty centering in Jesus as Messiah and Saviour, but would serve with an increased zeal for the betterment of Judaism.

It was therefore a normal thing for Peter and John to go to the Temple at the time of the evening prayer and sacrifice, as they had always done whenever they had been in Jerusalem. Such a visit, soon after Pentecost, was accompanied by a very unusual circumstance. At the Gate Beautiful of the Temple Peter and John healed a lame man in the name of the crucified and risen Saviour and by the power of the Spirit (Acts 3:1–10). But this additional and striking fruitage of Pentecost was rejected by the elders of the Jews. Inquiry resulted in the Jewish leaders’ pressing a prohibition against any further work in Jesus’ name—a prohibition the disciples, of course, ignored. Persecution now began. This further rejection by the Jews of Christianity was to lead to a separation between conservative Judaism and reforming Christianity.

The Common Purse.—While in fellowship with their Lord before the ascension the disciples had subsisted from a common purse, maintained by contributions (Luke 8:2, 3) and drawn upon for food and alms (John 4:8; 6:5–7), with Judas as the treasurer (ch. 13:29).

The same economy was used in the infant church. There was a common treasury, contributed to by all who wished, in any amount they desired. Fellowship among these early Christians was spiritual, theological, fraternal, and economic. It was effective throughout all the relationships of the believers with one another.

This ability of the church to find, under God, its own means of supporting itself, put Christ’s followers in the position of being no longer dependent upon the Jewish economy.

the church became self-sufficient. It had an all-absorbing purpose, to witness to its risen Lord. It had the power, the gift of the Holy Spirit. It quickly developed an organization, the rudiments of which had been created by Jesus Himself while on earth.

III. The Early Organization of the Church

The Apostolate.—Very naturally, for the supervision of the economy of the early church and for the organization it required, as well as for all other matters pertaining to the church and the welfare of its members, the latter looked to the apostles for leadership. These were the men whom Jesus had accepted, from the hundreds who from time to time followed Him, to be His pupils. They were His “apostles” (from the Gr. *apostellō*, “I send forth,” and *apostolos*, “one sent forth”), or “missionaries” (from the Latin *mitto*, “I send,” and *missus*, “one sent”). There were eleven now, for Judas Iscariot had proved a traitor: Simon, or Simeon, surnamed Peter, and his brother Andrew, fishermen by trade; James and his younger brother John, sons of Zebedee, called Boanerges, the sons of thunder, fishermen also; but John was somehow known in the high priest’s house (John 18:15) and according to a tradition written down a hundred years after, was entitled to priestly rank (Polycrates of Ephesus, in Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* v. 24. 3); Philip of Bethsaida; his friend Nathanael, known also as Bartholomew; Matthew Levi, the publican; Thomas, known as the doubter, also as Didymus, “the Twin”; James the Less, of the family of Alphaeus; Jude, known also as Lebbaeus Thaddaeus, of the family of one named James; and Simon the Zealot (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:14–19; Luke 6:13–16; Acts 1:13). Probably the most brilliant disciple, the one best equipped to make a success in life, was Judas Iscariot, the greatest failure. The others were great only because of the greatness of their Lord; wise only in the wisdom of their Lord; successful only in the success of their Lord, who had promised to work in and through them.

These men, with Matthias, who replaced Judas Iscariot, were the agents of the Holy Spirit in administering the church. They led the new converts into higher spiritual life and directed the distribution of funds from the common purse. This ministration was no light task. It carried serious responsibility. It meant the giving of needed care to people thrown out of line with their accustomed environment because of their new religious convictions. It also presented temptations. Ananias and Sapphira had pledged a certain sum of money to be placed in the common purse. They sold a piece of property to meet the pledge. When Ananias came to Peter to give the money, he professed to be giving the entire proceeds of the sale. But he lied to the Holy Spirit, and when Peter pointed this out to him, he died. A little later on the same day his wife, Sapphira, sought to perpetuate the same deception. She also died. “Great fear came upon all the church” (Acts 5:11).

This incident and the miracles that followed (Acts 5:12–16) gave Peter and the other apostles the opportunity to preach Jesus. Their unfaltering persistence in witnessing to Christ in defiance of the orders of the Jewish leaders resulted in their arrest and imprisonment. When the angel of the Lord released them, they returned to their preaching, and were arrested again. At this point Peter laid down an abiding principle for regulating the public relations of the church in a time of challenge: to “obey God rather than men” (v. 29). The apostles might have been put to death, had God not used Gamaliel to intervene in their behalf. That great teacher of the Jews urged tolerance. The apostles were then flogged, ordered to be silent, and released. Within only a few months they had experienced the second serious persecution.

The Diaconate.—Various difficulties attended the communal arrangement. The story of Pentecost indicates that many non-Palestinian Jews, called Hellenists, or “Grecians,” joined the church. Among these were widows, who soon complained that they were not receiving from the common purse adequate funds for their support.

The complaints became pressing, distracting the apostles from their work for the spiritual good and advancement of the church. A proposal was made and adopted that seven men of good reputation be selected to administer the material side of the church’s affairs. Since there were no church buildings in that early day, nor indeed until nearly two centuries later, and since no money was needed yet for the salaries of ministers or the dispatching of missionaries, the funds donated were used for the support of the poor and needy. In any congregation of five thousand to ten thousand, there would ordinarily be a large number of such members. But the transitional difficulty of entering the Christian fellowship, in a city as prejudiced against the Nazarene as Jerusalem was at that time, must have meant to many a dislocation in employment and serious social and economic disabilities. Doubtless the seven men had much work to do in taking care of the needs of the poor and the deprived in the congregations.

The names of the seven men were: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas (Acts 6:5). Judging from the names, which are Hellenistic, these were non-Palestinian Jews. At least one, Nicolas, was evidently a Gentile, for he is called a proselyte. This group was the prototype of a later order of deacons. It must be noted, however, that the elders (called “presidents”) are found in the 2d century handling the funds of the church (Justin Martyr *First Apology* 67), and it is possible that the seven elected administrators provided an organizational basis both for the deacons and for the elders or presbyters, whose office Paul fostered (Acts 14:23).

The Men of the Gifts.—The election of the seven administrators was a noteworthy feature of the development of church organization. Heretofore the church had functioned under men distinguished by having gifts of the Spirit, clearly defined as “apostles,” “prophets,” “evangelists,” “pastors,” and “teachers” (Eph. 4:11). These guides in the church, functioning for the church’s spiritual upbuilding (vs. 12–15), were not appointed by the church membership, but by the Holy Spirit as He imparted the gifts.

The apostles were, of course, at the head of these men, called *pneumatikoi*, or “spiritual” men. The term as applied to these men of special gifts generally designates them as men of changed nature, in contrast with the nature common to humanity; but technically it refers to men possessed by the Holy Spirit and exhibiting His special gifts (1 Cor. 2:15; 14:37; Gal. 6:1). Their authority is seen exercised in the case of the rebuking of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–10), the selecting of the seven (ch. 6:1–6), the dispatching and supervising of Philip, Peter, and John (ch. 8:5, 14). This was the administrative work, and it was quite in line with both Jewish and Greek practice to call the apostles, who were operating in this way, “elders” (chs. 11:29, 30; 15:2). Prophets seem also to have functioned administratively, as in the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas (ch. 13:1–3).

The Eldership.—Apparently there was in each congregation a plurality of elders. The example of the first appointment of officers at Jerusalem (Acts 6) makes this clear, as does the fact that Paul had not one elder, but “elders,” appointed in each congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

In the New Testament the Greek has two words that describe the office of elder. One is *presbuteros*, “older [man],” implying a position of dignity and respect, and corresponding to the English “presbyter,” or “elder,” originally as in modern times a functionary chosen from among the laymen. The other title is *episkopos*, meaning “overseer,” or “superintendent,” rendered “bishop” in English. That these words are both applied to the office of elder may be seen by comparing Acts 20:17 with v. 28, and also from their use in such passages as Titus 1:5–9.

The Episcopate.—It happened presently in the church, however, that these two Greek words took on different meanings as applying to different offices. Though at first the “bishop” served more as a sort of chairman, or first among equals, he gradually assumed more and more authority over those associated with him in the administration of the affairs of the local church. The term *episkopos* thus came to designate a “bishop” as the presiding elder, and eventually, in the 2d and 3d centuries, as a sort of overlord in the church. Such an officer of the church in the early centuries is now commonly known as a monarchical bishop. See p. 38.

IV. The Sundering of Christianity and Judaism

The Stoning of Stephen.—The seven men appointed to care for “tables,” as recorded in Acts 6, did not confine themselves to material work. They were vigorous evangelists. Philip, led by the Spirit to Samaria, was so blessed in his labors there that the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to aid him. The Spirit then took Philip southward into the desert, where he met and baptized the eunuch, perhaps the first Christian in Ethiopia.

Stephen busied himself evangelizing in the synagogues of the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 6:8–10). He argued effectively and convincingly, and there were many converts. But bitter opposition arose, and Stephen so angered the Jews that he was sentenced by the Sanhedrin to be put to death. He was stoned, while Saul of Tarsus held the garments of those who cast the fatal stones. The Romans were bribed not to investigate the matter (AA 101).

The Close of an Era.—This event, which so shocked the church and so crystallized the opposition of the Jews to Christianity, was climactic. The Jews had killed Jesus. Now it was evident that they had not changed their attitude toward the truths revealed by Jesus’ ministry. The further opportunity given them by the apostles was refused, and the stoning of Stephen is significant of their final rejection, as a nation, of the true Messiah and of His message of salvation. On the relationship of this to the prophecy of the 70 weeks see on Dan. 9:27.

The Persecution.—The stoning of Stephen opened a flood of persecution by the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem against the Christian sect. Strangely enough the apostles, who remained in Jerusalem, did not appear to have suffered personally, but there was a general scattering of the church throughout Judea and Samaria. There had been persecution before, some of it arising from the excitement attendant upon the healing of the lame man by Peter and John, but now the persecution was general and severe. It forced upon the church an opportunity to put into exercise over a wider area the power received at Pentecost, and to put their Lord’s commission more fully into effect.

A leader in the persecution was Saul of Tarsus, a young Pharisee who had studied under the great Jewish theologian Gamaliel I. Much was expected of Saul by the Jewish leaders. He showed himself fanatically bitter against the Christians (Acts 22:4, 5; 26:9–

12). While they were going “every where preaching the word” (ch. 8:4), Saul secured from the Sanhedrin a letter to the Jewish leaders in the city of Damascus, authorizing him to lead the Jews in a sweeping attack upon the Christians in that important city. He was nearing Damascus to accomplish the task when the voice of the Lord spoke to him from heaven, and challenged him to change his ways. Saul (Hebrew for “asked” one), or as better known, Paul (Latin for the “little” one), was converted completely to the Lord Jesus Christ, and became an untiring missionary-evangelist.

V. The Expansion of the Church

Paul’s Early Evangelism.—Paul preached for “many days” in Damascus and subsequently spent three years in study and meditation in the wilderness of Arabia (Gal. 1:17). Eventually he returned to Damascus, but barely escaped with his life, being let down one night over the city wall in a basket. He proceeded to Jerusalem, where Barnabas, a converted Jew from Cyprus, persuaded the apostles to receive him. Paul worked there with unflinching courage and vigor among the Jews, in the name of Christ, but when it was learned that the Hellenistic Jews were determined to kill him, the disciples sent him down to Caesarea. From there he proceeded to his native city of Tarsus, in Cilicia.

Peter’s Early Evangelism.—A time of temporary peace now followed for the church, and the apostles in Jerusalem were not slow to use the opportunity. In the course of itinerant work Peter, who had been helping Philip in Samaria, found himself in Joppa. Here the community was in mourning because of the death of Dorcas, one of the helpful women in the church. Peter now showed that he still possessed the power that had been with him on the day of Pentecost and when he had healed the lame man before the Beautiful Gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. At his bidding Dorcas was brought back to life, with the result that many accepted the gospel (Acts 9:42).

From there Peter was summoned by the miraculous intervention of an angel to interview Cornelius, a centurion in the “Italian” Cohort. Cornelius was sympathetic to the Jews, a believer in the true God of the Hebrews, and generous with his gifts to the cause of religion. Peter met with him, his family, and his friends, with the result that Cornelius accepted the gospel. When he asked for baptism, Peter hesitated, because Cornelius was a Gentile, but the Holy Spirit fell upon all those in the house, and Peter then baptized them (Acts 10:48).

Cornelius, however, was not a full proselyte. He had not yet been admitted into the Jewish communion. Therefore the report came to Jerusalem that Peter had baptized a Gentile into the Christian church. This aroused a great deal of criticism; Peter had to answer to the apostles in Jerusalem for what he had done. When he explained that the Holy Spirit had come upon these new converts the apostles had no further criticism, but justified Peter in his action.

The Death of James.—It was not long after this that the apostles Peter and James were thrown into prison by King Herod Agrippa I. Although Peter was released through the intervention of an angel, James was put to death.

The Gospel to the Gentiles.—At the same time the Holy Spirit was causing something else to happen in Antioch in Syria. During the persecution that had arisen in the case of Stephen, some of the believers had gone as far as Phoenicia and Antioch in Syria, and even to the island of Cyprus, but they had proclaimed the gospel only to Jews. However, when some of the converts from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch, they did

not restrict themselves to the Jews, but preached the gospel also to the Greeks. They were greatly blessed in this, and a large number believed (Acts 11:19–21).

This is noteworthy. It is the first time that Gentiles, men not already touched somewhat with the religion of the Jews, accepted the message of Christ the Lord. The Ethiopian whom Philip met had been in Jerusalem worshiping with the Jews; Cornelius was already a “God-fearer”; but now Greeks in Antioch, men previously untouched by the religion of the Scriptures, came into the Christian church. Here the believers in Christ were first called Christians.

When word of this remarkable development came to the brethren in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas, himself a man of Cyprus, to see what had taken place. Barnabas was delighted with what he found at Antioch, and after a time set off to Tarsus to find Paul. He brought him to Antioch, and he and Barnabas were together for a year there, teaching the converts and reaching out for others. The results of this evangelistic campaign were excellent.

Paul’s Missionary Journeys.—In the book of Acts there is no mention of elders or deacons in the church in Antioch, but there is given a list of names of men who had the gifts of the Spirit, particularly the gifts of prophecy and of teaching. Barnabas and Saul are so listed, along with Simeon, called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, who is mentioned as a foster brother of Herod the tetrach, who had put John to death. These men were moved by the Holy Spirit to plan a far more extensive missionary program than had yet been attempted in the church. Upon their invitation, Barnabas and Paul consented to enter upon this program. Under the leading of the Holy Spirit the prophets and teachers of Antioch ordained Barnabas and Paul and sent them out on what was to become known as Paul’s First Missionary Journey. See Paul’s First Missionary Tour.

The First Journey.—On the first of the three missionary tours for which Paul is noted, he had for his companions Barnabas of Cyprus, who had befriended Paul when he first came to Jerusalem to meet with the church there and who had been responsible for calling Paul to Antioch from Cilicia; and a nephew of Barnabas, John Mark. The missionary company sailed from Antioch in Syria to Cyprus, where they witnessed both through healing and through preaching, and then proceeded to visit certain cities in south-central Asia Minor, now Turkey. Before their tour of southern Asia Minor, however, Mark withdrew. Here, their efforts were attended with remarkable success. Their spiritual gifts were manifested in acts of healing and in successful preaching. They invariably went first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, and with both classes their work was attended with good fruitage. Churches were organized in the cities visited, and elders were appointed to preside over these companies (Acts 14:23). In spite of the severe opposition of the Jews in every place, Paul and Barnabas returned over the route they had followed, strengthening the churches, and then set sail for Antioch in Syria from Attalia, the seaport of Pamphylia. See Paul’s First Missionary Tour.

The Second Journey.—The Jerusalem Council, record of which is found in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, took place following their return. Afterward Paul and Barnabas planned to make another tour. Barnabas wished to take with them again John Mark, but since John had early deserted them on the former tour, Paul refused to permit him to go along the second time. So severe was the difference on this issue between the two evangelists that Paul and Barnabas went separate ways: Barnabas to Cyprus,

accompanied by John Mark; and Paul by land northward through Syria into Cilicia, his own native province, accompanied by Silas. See Paul's Second Missionary Tour.

From there Paul and Silas proceeded to visit some of the inland churches that Paul had raised up on the first journey. They then journeyed westward, planning to go into the province of Asia adjoining the Aegean Sea, but were forbidden by the Holy Spirit. When they sought to enter Bithynia, the Spirit again forbade them. These two provinces seem to have been evangelized by the apostle Peter (1 Peter 1:1).

Moving on to Troas, Paul and Silas were instructed in a vision to continue to Macedonia. From there they went through Greece, preaching the gospel, and came as far south as Corinth. Paul sailed from there to Ephesus, then proceeded to Caesarea in Palestine and thence to Antioch in Syria.

The Third Journey.—Having spent some time at Antioch, Paul again set off, on what is known as his Third Missionary Journey, proceeding through Galatia and Phrygia and spending a period of three years in Ephesus. When opposition eventually necessitated his leaving the city he proceeded to Macedonia and then on into Greece. He had thought to sail from there to Syria, but instead, with quite a company of disciples, he returned through Macedonia, crossed to Troas, and then sailed along the Aegean coast toward Jerusalem. At Miletus he met the elders of the church of Ephesus, then continued to Tyre, and sailing to Caesarea, proceeded from there to Jerusalem. Paul was welcomed by the brethren, in a reception quite different from that of twenty years before, after his conversion at Damascus. However, the brethren felt that Paul should indicate his loyalty to things Jewish. They suggested that he take with him into the Temple four other men, and there perform the rituals required by Jewish law.

Paul's First Imprisonment.—Paul consented, but when the Jews saw him in the Temple they raised such an outcry that it was necessary for Roman soldiers to intervene, and Paul found himself under protection of the soldiery. For the next two years Paul was a prisoner in Jerusalem and in Caesarea. He was interviewed by Felix and by Festus, Roman procurators, and by Herod Agrippa II and Berenice. In the meantime, having given up hope that he would receive relief from the governor and wishing to avoid trial before the Sanhedrin, Paul appealed to Caesar and was transported to Rome. No charges were placed against Paul there. Accordingly, he was acquitted and released, after having been there two years.

The Intervening Years.—Immediately Paul took up his missionary work again. According to Clement of Rome, perhaps the friend to whom Paul referred in Phil. 4:3, Paul preached in both East and West (*The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 5). He had expressed his intention of once more visiting the Christians at Philippi (Phil. 2:24) and at Colossae (Philemon 22; cf. Col. 4:9; Philemon 10). He may have visited Ephesus, after leaving Macedonia, and perhaps also Colossae and Laodicea. Clement states that Paul went to the "limits" of the West, which probably meant Spain. If this visit was made, it was in keeping with the intention he had earlier expressed to the Romans (Rom. 15:28). The Muratorian Fragment (A.D. 170) plainly states that Paul went to Spain. The pastoral epistles suggest that he went also to Crete, Ephesus, and to Nicopolis and Troas in Macedonia.

Paul's Second Imprisonment and Death.—Probably at Troas Paul was placed under arrest again, was taken to Rome, and according to legend was confined in the Mamertime dungeon near the Roman Forum. Sometime about the years A.D. 66–68 he

was put to death as a martyr. Luke and, possibly, Timothy and Mark appear to have been his only human companions in those last dark hours (2 Tim. 4:11).

VI. Judaism in the Christian Church

The Problem.—It was inevitable that, as soon as the church engaged in worldwide missionary work, a serious difficulty and misunderstanding should arise within its membership. The first Christians were Jews. They knew the Jewish faith as the only true faith, and the God it worshiped as the only true God. They believed thoroughly in the inspiration and spiritual authority of the Scriptures that had come down to them from their fathers. They knew of proselyting, but that meant bringing Gentiles into the Jewish church, with the understanding that such converts should observe all things required of the Jews.

Jesus had based His program and teachings upon the Scriptures. While He had criticized the traditional accretions, formalities, externalities, and hypocrisies of the religious leaders He met, Jesus insisted that He had not come to change the Law or the Prophets, but rather to make their teachings successful as a spiritual fact in the experience of the people. The Jews who followed Christ mistakenly concluded that those who were brought in line with Jesus' teachings would also follow the practices of the Jewish church. If they were to become members of the Christian sect, they must also become members of the great body of Judaism.

The leaders of the Christian group were therefore very watchful concerning what their colleagues would do in respect to the Gentiles. Philip baptized the Ethiopian, but this man was already a worshiper, having gone up to Jerusalem to worship the true God in His holy Temple. When Peter baptized Cornelius and his family, he had to give an account to the brethren in Jerusalem for what he had done. Even though Cornelius was already a recognized believer in the true God, Peter was able to clear himself with his brethren only on the basis that the Holy Spirit had already accepted Cornelius before Peter proceeded to baptize him.

Requirements for Gentile Converts.—Until mention of a difference in Acts 15:1, 2, we do not have information concerning any problems in Antioch when pagan Greeks there were brought into the church by the missionaries from Cyprus and Cyrene. But when Paul and Barnabas went out on their far-flung missionary journeys, the question as to the treatment of the Gentiles who should become Christians came very definitely to a head. Barnabas and Paul baptized pagans into the Christian church. Should these pagans undergo the age-old tribal sign of circumcision, the pledge of allegiance to the Hebrew covenant with God, coming down from Abraham, "the father of the faithful"? Should they come to Jerusalem to observe the three principal feasts, attendance upon which was required of all male Jews (Ex. 23:14–17; Deut. 16:16, 17)? Should they look to the sacrifices as a means of expressing their faith in salvation?

Paul and Barnabas felt that the answer to these questions was definitely and emphatically No. Certain Palestinian Jewish Christians were equally clear that the answer should be Yes. This was the background and occasion for the Council of Jerusalem, recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Acts.

The Council at Jerusalem.—How wide a representation from various churches was gathered at Jerusalem for the council is not clear. Paul and Barnabas were delegates from Antioch. They also represented the interests of the churches they had just raised up in the

distant provinces they had visited. The elders mentioned (Acts 15:6) may have represented various churches in Palestine (see AA 190, 196).

The discussion was full and earnest, and perhaps warm. There were members of the Christian brotherhood who were still Pharisees, and these insisted that “it was needful to circumcise” the Gentile converts, “and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). After the disputation had gone on for some time, Peter rose and spoke, and to good effect. He recalled his experience, with the vision he had had, before going to instruct Cornelius, the centurion of the Italian band. He recalled that the Holy Spirit had fallen upon Cornelius and his household even before they had received the baptismal rite. He knew that God “put no difference between” Jews and Christians, “purifying their hearts of faith” (vs. 8, 9). “Now therefore,” Peter demanded, “why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (vs. 10, 11).

Barnabas and Paul then made a full report of the work they had done on their recent tour, reciting their experiences, indicating the converts they had won, and describing the miracles God had enabled them to perform. It must have been a convincing recital indeed, because the council then seemed ready to reach a decision.

The Council’s Decision.—The presiding elder, James (see Acts 15:13), made the concluding speech. Confirming Peter’s view, James declared that the prophets had spoken of the rebuilding of the house of David in order that men everywhere might call upon the name of the Lord. “Wherefore,” said James, “my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (vs. 19, 20).

In response to James’s suggestion, a letter was drawn up setting forth the fact that although there were those who had insisted that the converted Gentiles must keep the requirements of the law, the brethren at Jerusalem had given no such commandment. Therefore, said the letter, Barnabas and Paul were returning with the decision of the council, accompanied by Judas Barsabas and Silas. “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well” (Acts 15:28, 29).

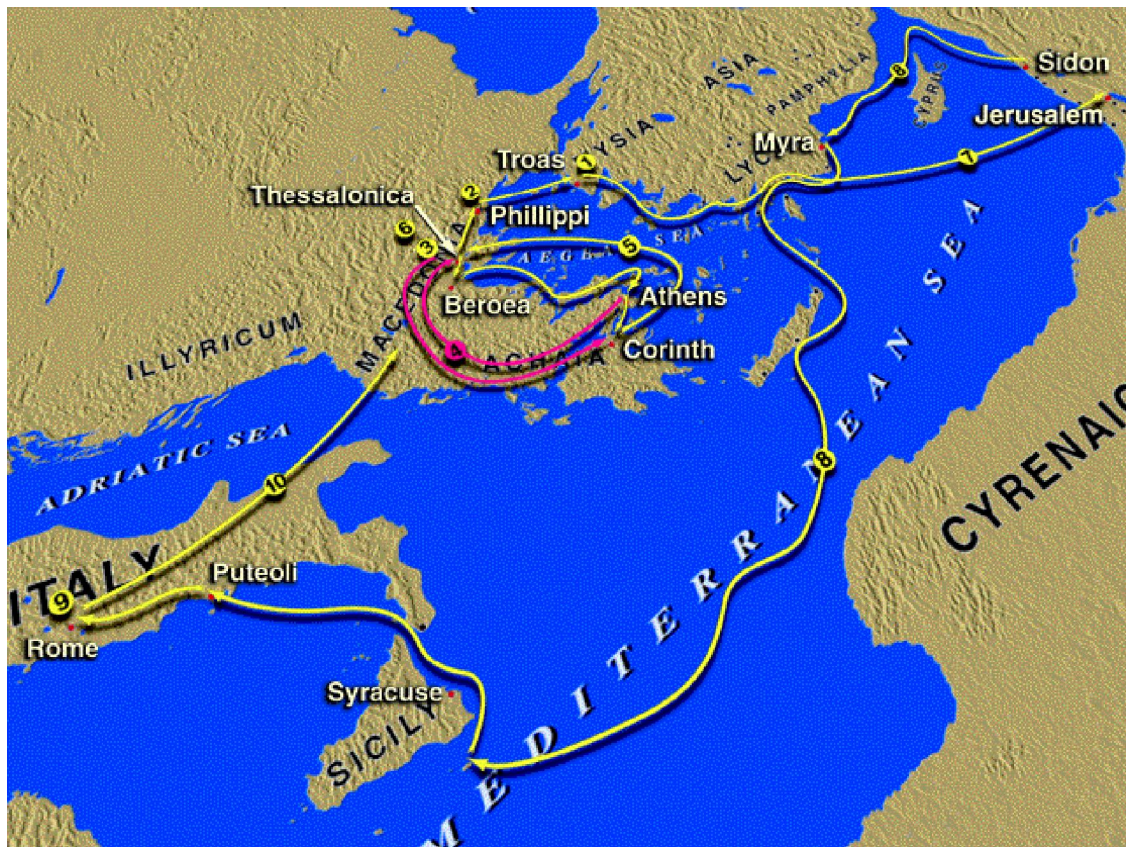
The Jerusalem Council was one of the great events in the history of the Christian church. The decision of the council was to all effects a great proclamation of emancipation. One can only speculate as to what would have been the effect upon the Christian church had the emissaries of Christ, as they went over the world, sought to impose upon their non-Jewish converts all the requirements of the Jewish law. On the surface of things, it would have necessitated these converts’ taking upon themselves in a non-Jewish world all the peculiar problems from which Jews were suffering in that day. It would have enforced upon them a program of ritual that would undoubtedly have hampered their growth at the beginning of the movement. It must in the nature of things have obliterated the clear picture of Jesus Christ dying on the cross, and substituted for it ceremonies which at their best were but a type of the sacrifice of the Son of God. The continuance of circumcision would have linked the Gentile Christians to a peculiarly

racial and theocratic rite. In contrast, the genius of Christianity must emphasize the individual relationship with Jesus Christ. This personal fellowship must be a reality on the basis of faith, a faith that could not be had in infancy, when the Jews applied the tribal sign of circumcision, but at an age of intelligent accountability.

The decision of the council at Jerusalem set the church free to grow, with no racial or national trammels to hamper it in reaching all men. The emancipation the early church received at the council was a most significant factor in its steady growth among the Gentiles during the apostolic era, and was reflected also in its spirit of freedom and power in Christ.

Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians

¹



Events Associated With the Writing of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians, Written From Corinth During Paul's Second Missionary Tour, c. A.D. 51

The Work of the Judaizers.—But this noble decision of the council, conceived so clearly and enunciated at a time so vital in the church's history, was not accepted without a struggle on the part of those who wished to maintain Judaism in the church. Peter has spoken in defense of Gentile liberation. When he followed the emissaries of the council to Antioch, he fellowshiped freely with the Gentile converts there. But the Pharisaic party

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ac 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

among the Christians in Jerusalem were not content. They also sent representatives to Antioch, professing to come in the name of James and with the authority of the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:12).

Paul Versus Peter.—Under the pressure they brought to bear, Peter “dissembled,” ceased to fellowship with the Gentiles, and allied himself with the ritualistic party from Jerusalem. Even Barnabas was “carried away,” and stood against Paul (Gal. 2:13). But Paul was not willing to let the victory won at Jerusalem become fruitless. He “withstood” Peter “to the face” (v. 11), and challenged him with “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ” (v. 16), adding that “we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

This controversy caused Paul to write the Epistle to the Galatians some years later to counteract the influence of the Judaizers who followed Paul’s route and worked among his converts. This situation must be recognized also as the background for the Epistle to the Romans, which Paul wrote probably about the same time that he wrote to the Galatians. In fact, the problem of Judaism continued to perplex and trouble the Christian church for more than two centuries.

Indeed, a literature arose over a supposed lifelong controversy between Peter and Paul on the question of Judaizing. Typical of this are the so-called *Recognitions of Clement* and the *Clementine Homilies*. In these romances Peter is portrayed as having a struggle with Simon Magus; again and again he conquers his foe, both in disputation and in wonders performed. It is possible that these documents are a product of the Judaizing group, who, recognizing Peter as the apostle to the circumcision, made him the hero in the struggle to preserve Judaism in the Christian church, and used Simon Magus as a figure of opposition to Peter, when they really had the apostle Paul in mind.

However this may be, the contest was very real and resulted in increasing bitterness between the two factions in the church. Indeed, it is likely that the Judaizing party passed on some of their feeling to the Jews in general. This doubtless increased the animosity with which the Jews looked upon the Christian sect. An illustration of this was the attack made on Paul in Jerusalem upon his return to that city after his third journey, which resulted in his arrest, imprisonment, and transportation to Rome. A natural reaction in the Christian church was an endeavor on the part of the Gentile Christians to escape as far as possible from Judaistic influences and from being confused with the Jews. As will be pointed out later, this desire to escape from similarities with the Jews brought about marked changes in the beliefs, forms, and practices of Christianity as tides of Gentiles, lacking sympathy with Judaism, came sweeping into the church.

VII. The Later Work of the Apostles

Peter’s Later Service.—Because of Luke’s industry as a historian, far more is known of Paul’s work than of Peter’s. Luke records some facts regarding Peter, and Paul also makes a few passing references to his later career.

Soon after James the son of Zebedee was put to death by Herod Agrippa I, that king also imprisoned Peter, but did not succeed in executing him, since the apostle was delivered miraculously by an angel (Acts 12:3–19). Inasmuch as this appears to have occurred shortly before Herod’s own death, it may reasonably be dated in A.D. 44 (see p. 97). Peter next appears at the Jerusalem Council, where his speech opened the way for the decision to relieve Gentile Christians from following the Jewish ritual (Acts 15:7–11).

Thereafter Peter disappears from the narrative in Acts. Paul mentions him as having been at Antioch apparently shortly after the Jerusalem Council (Gal. 2:11), and Eusebius, writing almost three centuries later, indicates that he was the first bishop of Antioch (*Ecclesiastical History* iii. 36. 2). It would seem evident from his introduction in his first epistle (ch. 1:1) that Peter had labored among the inhabitants of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, an area that covers much of the northern and western parts of Asia Minor.

There is a tradition that Peter spent many years at Rome in the leadership of the church there. Eusebius, according to the Armenian version of his *Chronicle*, states that Peter went to Rome in the third year of Caligula, which would be A.D. 39. Later in the same document he places Peter's martyrdom at Rome in the thirteenth year of Nero, A.D. 66, thus giving Peter some twenty-seven years at Rome. Jerome, writing a few decades after Eusebius, declares that Peter went to Rome in the second year of Claudius, A.D. 42, and remained there for twenty-five years, until the fourteenth year of Nero, A.D. 67 (*De Viris Illustribus* i). It is highly improbable that either of these traditions is correct, for Peter could hardly have spent so long a period at Rome. If he did go there as early as these traditions indicate, he must necessarily have broken his sojourn for some considerable period, both for his presence at the council at Jerusalem and subsequent visit to Antioch, and for his probable missionary activities in a wide area of Asia Minor. Furthermore, the fact that Peter nowhere appears in any of Paul's correspondence to or from Rome, where Paul mentions many believers who were in the city, is an indication that Peter most probably was not at Rome in the winter of A.D. 57/58, when Paul wrote Romans, nor during the years from about A.D. 61 to 63, when Paul was imprisoned there the first time.

The tradition of Peter's early arrival at Rome may have arisen in connection with reports concerning Simon Magus. Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150) reports that one Simon, a Samaritan, came to Rome in the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41–54) and did "mighty acts of magic" (*First Apology* 26; *ANF*, vol. 1, p. 171). Irenaeus (c. A.D. 185; *Against Heresies* i. 23. 1–4) repeats this story and identifies this Simon with Simon the sorcerer whom Peter had rebuked at Samaria (Acts 8:9–23). A legendary document called The Acts of Peter With Simon, probably from about A.D. 200, tells an elaborate tale of how, by a vision of Christ, Peter was sent to Rome to oppose Simon. Since Simon was understood to have arrived there during the time of Claudius, it would be a logical conclusion that Peter must have gone to Rome about the same time. However, such a legend as this concerning Simon Magus is quite insufficient evidence for placing Peter's arrival at Rome so early.

The foregoing evidence does not mean, however, that Peter never was in Rome. Early Christian tradition is strong that Peter was a leader in the Roman church and died there. Ignatius (c. A.D. 116) indicates that Peter had taught at Rome (*To the Romans* 4), and Irenaeus (c. A.D. 185) declares that Peter and Paul, "having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate" (*Against Heresies* iii. 3. 3; *ANF*, vol. 1, p. 416). Although it is clear from the New Testament that Paul did not found the Roman church (see Rom. 1:13; 15:23, 24), and in view of the evidence given above, it is likewise doubtful that Peter did, nevertheless these strong early traditions make it probable that Peter died at Rome. As early as c. A.D. 200, Gaius, a Roman Christian, declared that Peter's "trophy," probably either his grave or the place of

his martyrdom, was known to be in the Vatican, at that time not a building, but a cemetery (see AA 537).

The question of Peter's stay at Rome is quite apart from that of the primacy of the popes, who trace their office to him. Their claim must finally stand or fall, not in terms of whether Peter was at Rome, but on the quite different questions of Peter's position in the church and the true nature of apostolic succession. For further discussion of this problem see Vol. IV, p. 836, and on Matt. 16:18.

The Apostle John. Even less is known of the apostle John than of Paul or Peter. In the beginning years John worked with Peter. He was accompanying Peter when the two of them, on their way into the Temple for worship, healed the lame man (Acts 3). He was sent with Peter by the apostles in Jerusalem to help Philip in his evangelization of Samaria (Acts 8). This was not many years after Pentacost. Except for Gal. 2:9, the next record we have of him in Scripture is his own statement that he was "in the isle that is called Patmos," a "companion in tribulation" to those who also were suffering persecution (Rev. 1:9). A credible tradition (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* v. 30. 3) puts John's writing of the Revelation toward the end of the reign of the emperor Domitian, who died in A.D. 96. There is no inspired record of what happened to John during the sixty years between Samaria and Patmos.

Recognizing that John, having seen the extraordinary and significant visions unfolded to him at Patmos, would wish to record them immediately, one can readily understand how he would eagerly write out the visions. Then he would dispatch into hands safer than those of a prisoner on Patmos. That he was swept back into the atmosphere and emotion of the earlier prophets during his writing of the Apocalypse is evidence by the fact that a large part of the vocabulary and even phraseology is closely parallel to those of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

John gives no indication in his Gospel as to where he was when he wrote it, but Irenaeus (*ibid.* iii. 3. 4) states that John was at Ephesus until the reign of Trajan A.D. 98–117), and it is considered likely that he wrote the Gospel from there.

According to Polycrates, who presided over the church at Smyrna about A.D. 200, John was a priest "wearing the breastplate" (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* v. 24. 3; Loeb ed., vol. 1, p. 507). An apocryphal document, Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, whose authorship and reliability are impossible to determine, describes in great detail John's arrest and his appearance before Domitian, at which time the apostle bore witness of the gospel. In the presence of Domitian, it is said, he drank a cup of poison with out harm, and raised up from the dead a servant of the king. According to Tertullian, who wrote early in the 3d century, John was cast into a vat of boiling oil and was removed unhurt, just before his exile to Patmos (*On Prescription Against Heretics* 36; cf. AA 570).

John had a strong conviction concerning truth, as is borne out again and again in his Gospel, and a corresponding dislike for heresy (1 John 2:18, 19, 22, 23; 2 John 7–9). This dislike is illustrated in a story told of him. When he was about to enter a certain bathhouse at Ephesus he learned that a so-called Christian Gnostic and Cerinthus was there. Upon hearing this, John is supposed to have fled, crying out that the walls of the bathhouse might fall because Cerinthus was within (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* iii. 3. 4). Out of all this it is difficult, however, to separate fact from fancy.

John's leadership of the church at Ephesus must inevitably have made it a great evangelistic center. Indeed, the centers of the church may well have changed with the emergence and disappearance of great Christian leaders. In the opening years of the gospel economy, the center was unquestionably Jerusalem, where at least some of the apostles dwelt, where the great council was held, and from which the "sent ones" set forth upon their missions. This could well have been the case until A.D. 50, after the council.

In the meantime the Cypriote and Cyrenian missionaries had initiated an active and successful missionary endeavor among the Gentiles in and around Antioch, and from here Paul and Barnabas were sent on their daring missionary enterprise among the Gentiles. At least for the reaching of the Gentiles, Antioch must have been a center for Christian service beginning about A.D. 44, and continuing so until Paul's death, or later.

Paul's years of residence at Ephesus made the city important to Christians. He assigned his disciple Timothy to that place, apparently after his first Roman imprisonment. Doubtless the leadership of this gifted young man kept it a hub of activity for Christ. When John assumed leadership there, the importance of Ephesus must have been enhanced even more.

The Other Apostles.—There is no reliable information concerning the other apostles. Their activities and final end are in even more obscurity than John's or Peter's. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, is said to have preached the gospel in Scythia and in Thrace, north of Greece, and to have been crucified in Greece on an X-shaped cross, hence called St. Andrew's cross. Nothing certain is known of the fate of James the Less. Jude, the author of the Epistle, is said to have preached in Palestine, Syria, and Arabia. Tradition assigns Matthew to Parthia and Persia and suggests that he did not suffer martyrdom. Matthias, chosen, according to the record of the first chapter of Acts, to fill the vacancy left by Judas, is said to have been one of the Seventy whom Christ sent out to preach (Luke 10:1), and to have preached in Cappadocia, north of Paul's home province of Cilicia, and to have been martyred, perhaps in Judea. According to Josephus (*Antiquities* xx. 9. 1), James the brother of our Lord was stoned to death in the courts of the Temple.

The tradition is strong that Mark, the author of the Gospel by that name, thought to be the young man who refused to continue on the First Missionary Journey with Barnabas and Paul and whom Paul asked to join him while a prisoner in Rome (2 Tim. 4:11, preached in Egypt. It is supposed that he founded the church in Alexandria and was its presiding elder. He is said to have been martyred there during the Neronian persecution. Nathanael, or Bartholomew, is thought to have preached in Arabia, and perhaps in the lands adjoining what is known as Ethiopia. However, tradition maintains that he was crucified head downward in one of the provinces of Armenia.

It is obvious that tradition confuses Philip the apostle and Philip the deacon. As far as the Bible record is concerned, nothing is known of Philip the apostle after the record of the Gospel of John, where he is spoken of more than in the other gospel records, Philip of the book of Acts is the deacon. Tradition maintains that Philip the apostle preached in Phrygia.

Simon the Zealot is said to have preached in North Africa and to have been martyred in Palestine under Domitian, the emperor who sent John to the island of Patmos. Tradition assigns Thomas to Parthia and Persia, and in his later years to Edessa, where he is said to have been martyred. However, there is also a tradition that Thomas preached

the gospel in India, and there is in India today a group of native Christians who call themselves the Thomas Christians. The probability is that Thomas' labors did not reach that far.

VIII. Developing Church Organization

The Exercise of Supervision.—For most of the activities of the church for which there is inspired record, there are strong indications of planning and administrative supervision. The apostles were at first in Jerusalem, and remained there even during the persecution arising from the stoning of Stephen. From there they sent Peter and John to help Philip in Samaria. When Peter dealt with Cornelius, the brethren in Jerusalem were troubled, and asked Peter to give an accounting. When the grave matter of the extent to which ritual was to be required of the Gentiles had to be settled, the brethren called a more or less representative council in Jerusalem and felt free to send word out from there to the churches as to the decision reached. All of this indicates that the apostles recognized the validity of referring problems of general concern to an authority more central than that of the local congregations.

The Spirit's Guidance in Administration.—There did not seem to be direction by any particular group to send the men from Cyrene and Cyprus to Antioch in Syria to engage in evangelism there. But their work was reviewed with approval by Barnabas, and when it was found advantageous to profit by the success of their endeavors, Barnabas journeyed to Cilicia and brought Paul to labor in Antioch.

Elders and deacons are not mentioned in the church in Antioch. It was prophets and teachers, men with specific gifts of the Spirit, who sent Paul and Barnabas on their famous First Missionary Journey. It is not indicated to what extent the brethren at Antioch laid out for Barnabas and Paul the route they were to follow. Rather, one has the impression that they operated under the leadership of the Spirit. Certainly Paul on his second journey knew this leadership, because he was prevented from entering certain provinces while on that journey. As a matter of fact, the Holy Spirit is the over-all divine Guide for the church.

The men of the Spirit, the apostles, prophets, teachers, and evangelists, were active in leading the church. The deacons, as such, were appointed to supervise the distribution of goods and food to the members of the church in Jerusalem. This was essentially an administrative function. Under the blessing of the Spirit, they proved also to be successful evangelists. Therefore no sharp division in this early day between the elders and deacons as administrative officers, and the apostles, prophets, teachers, and evangelists as men of the Spirit, can be pressed. However, the distinction grew in later years between these two classes of functionaries in the church. The elders and deacons increased in administrative power and influence, and the men of the Spirit not only became less numerous but, as is evident from later Christian writings, actually fell into disrepute.

The Presbytery.—For the official leadership in the local congregations two terms were used. One, *presbuteros*, literally, "older," indicates one in a position of respect. The word has come into English as "priest" and "presbyter," although the medieval and modern Christian priests have ritualistic and sacerdotal functions that the presbyter of the early church never thought of exercising. The other term is "bishop," from the Greek *episkopos*, "an overseer." It must be noted that in the early church these two titles did not

designate two different offices. The fact that they were applied interchangeably to the same office is shown clearly in Acts 20:17, 28, where the elders of Ephesus who met Paul at Melitus are called both elders and bishops or “overseers.” The same exchange of terms is found in Paul’s letter to Titus, ch. 1:5–9, where in describing the qualifications for the leaders of the church, the terms “elder” and “bishop” are used synonymously. The differentiation that emerges between the term “bishop” on the one hand and “presbyter,” or “priest,” on the other, is of a much later time than either the apostolic or the subapostolic church. Indeed, Clement, the leader of the church at Rome just before the close of the 1st century, in writing his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, knows only “presbyters” (chs. 44 and 47), and uses for the presbyterial office the term “episcopate,” that is, “oversight” (ch. 44). Even more striking is the fact that Irenaeus, leader of the church of Lyons in Gaul about the year 185, still speaks of the predecessors of Victor, leader of the church at Rome, as presbyters (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* v. 24. 14).

Why then the two terms? It is clear that they designate the same activity. “Elder,” or “presbyter,” is evidently the title of the office; “overseer” is used to name the function of the office.

The Episcopate at Antioch.—The episcopate evolved out of the chief eldership (see p. 26), though not at the same rate everywhere. The monarchical episcopate seems to have emerged earliest at Antioch in Syria. It is not known what happened there after Paul’s imprisonment about the year 60 or 61. Eusebius names the leaders of the church at Antioch as Peter, Euodius, and Ignatius (*Ecclesiastical History* iii. 36. 2; 22).

This tradition of Peter’s primacy at Antioch, however, does not accord with the record of the book of Acts. Peter was in Antioch “dissembling” in the matter of Judaism, and was challenged by Paul for so doing (Gal. 2:11–21). The church was, of course, already organized at Antioch, and Peter was scarcely its leader then.

In Acts 13:1, 2 it is revealed that the early leadership of the Antiochene church was furnished by men of the spiritual gifts, the *pneumatikoi*. It may have been that vigorous men, coming to leadership there later, hastened the decline of the power of the men of the gifts, who as a class fell under suspicion. If this kind of leadership developed, the episcopate might well have crystallized into a commanding ecclesiastical order by Ignatius’ time.

The Monarchical Episcopate of Ignatius.—Ignatius of Antioch was martyred about A.D. 116, in persecution under the emperor Trajan. Information concerning him comes from biographical material contained in the martyrological tradition of the church and dated some hundreds of years after his death. Also, there are epistles attributed to Ignatius, as though written while he was on his way, a prisoner, to Rome, but these are of very doubtful authenticity. Philip Schaff, church historian, says of them: “These oldest documents of the hierarchy soon became so interpolated, curtailed, and mutilated by pious fraud, that it is today almost impossible to discover with certainty the genuine Ignatius of history from the hyper- and pseudo-Ignatius of tradition” (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, p. 660).

In the martyrology of Ignatius, and in several of the epistles, the bishops of the churches are spoken of in terms of the highest sanctity and ecclesiastical authority. There occur in the *Epistles* such expressions as: “Live in harmony with the will of the bishop,” “Your ... presbytery ... is attuned to the bishop as the strings to a harp” (*To the Ephesians* 4); “We must regard the bishop as the Lord himself” (*ibid.* 6); “Be zealous to

do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place [*eis topos*] of God and the presbyters in the place of the Council of the Apostles. ... Be united with the bishop" (*To the Magnesians* 6); "Be subject to the bishop and to one another" (*ibid.* 13); "in subjection to the bishop as to Jesus Christ. ... Do nothing without the bishop" (*To the Trallians* 2); "Let all respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, even as the bishop is also a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and the college of Apostles" (*ibid.* 3); "Let no one do any of the things appertaining to the Church without the bishop" (*To the Smyrnaeans* 8); "He who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop is serving the devil" (*ibid.* 9). (See Loeb ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 177; 181; 201, 203; 209; 213, 215; 215; 261; 261, 263.)

Contemporary Testimony.—Taken at their face value, these statements from the extant Ignatian documents require us to conclude that the episcopate had already evolved into a monarchical authority at Antioch by the time of Ignatius' death. But these statements cannot be taken so seriously. One reason is that contemporary documents from the same region do not show the elevation of the episcopate that the Ignatian epistles indicate. For instance, a document produced sometime in the 2d century, called Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (*Didache*), gives no such elevation to the bishops. The document is not apostolic; its author is unknown. Since it is generally agreed to be Syrian in background it comes from the same environment and conditions as those of the supposed Ignatian letters.

But the *Didache* says of the episcopate only: "Appoint therefore for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord. ... Do not despise them, for they are your honourable men together with the prophets and teachers" (15; Loeb ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 331). The bishops are not here classed above the men of the spiritual gifts.

About the same time Clement of Rome, and Irenaeus of Lyons some ninety years later, show that the leaders in the church in Rome were still being called "presbyters" at the very time Ignatius was martyred, and for seventy years thereafter. Therefore either the Ignatian bishop is a creation of a later hand or the men of the Spirit in Antioch were very quickly deprived of their leadership, an elected ecclesiastical leadership taking their place and developing a strong episcopate with the most remarkable rapidity.

Apostolic Succession.—A little before A.D. 200, Irenaeus, leader of the church in Gaul, developed a clear-cut theory of the episcopate. This he sets forth in book iii of his treatise *Against Heresies*. His thesis is that the apostles handed down the true Christian teaching to the bishops, who were supposed to have succeeded them. He holds that the bishops of churches founded by the apostles were the preservers of sacred tradition. In this thesis is the beginning of the theory of apostolic succession.

The Established Episcopate.—The first clear evidence of the bishop as the authoritarian leader of the various congregations is shown in the writings of Cyprian, bishop of the churches centering in Carthage in North Africa. Cyprian was martyred in A.D. 258. Eusebius, the church historian, calls all church leaders "bishop" from the very earliest times, but in doing so he is, of course, speaking from the point of view, and using the terminology, of A.D. 324, at which time the bishops were fully monarchical in authority virtually everywhere.

Causes for Elevation of the Bishop.—In reality, the successors to the apostles in terms of ecclesiastical authority were the presiding elders. It took years for the office of

elder to evolve into the monarchical episcopate. The causes of its evolution are recognizable:

1. *The City Bishop*. The presiding elders in the largest city acquired in the church a prestige in proportion to the importance of the cities where they were. Although the group of believers in a given place was considered one church, there would be several congregations meeting in different places within the municipality. Since Christianity was an illegal society, incapable of owning property, each group made use of homes or hired halls for gathering places. Over this aggregation of small meetings the chief elder presided. The larger the city, the more honored was his position.

2. *The Bishop and Scripture*. The presiding elder was the custodian of Scripture and of the truths it contained, as well as purveyor of the apostolic "rule of faith." Copies of the Scriptures must have been relatively scarce, since they were produced by hand. The better and more complete portions of Scripture would be put into the hands of the chief elder as custodian. Thus he became an embodiment of orthodoxy, an exponent of the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Later persecution was directed against the bishop as custodian of the Scriptures, and those who surrendered the Scriptures under duress were branded in the judgment of the church as "traitors."

3. *The Bishop and Orthodoxy*. Since he possessed the Scriptures, the presiding elder became a standard of orthodoxy. As his office evolved into the later bishopric, he was looked upon as the successor of the apostles (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* iii. 3. 3) and the interpreter of truth. Hence his was the responsibility of protecting the church from the intrusions of heretics. The apostolic concern of John and Paul in opposing heresies has already been pointed out. (See pp. 33, 36 concerning the subject of early heresy). As shepherds of the flock, the chief elders of the churches used their rising authority to meet those who sought to divert the believers, and their success in so doing enhanced their power and influence.

4. *The Bishop and Church Finance*. The finances of the church were in the hands of the presiding elders. Just how the transition was made in respect to this item of administrative care, from the "seven men of honest report" of the early apostolic days to the chief elder and incipient bishop, is not clear. But by the middle of the 2d century the "president" was receiving the offerings and dispensing them, largely to the poor. This gave him great standing in the church, and thus enhanced the power of the rising episcopate. Justin Martyr says of the offering taken on the "day of the Sun": "What is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need" (*First Apology* 67 ANF, vol. 1, p. 186).

A letter written by the bishop of Rome, Cornelius, about the year A.D. 251, shows the extent of the charitable work of the church and the influence of the bishop who dispensed the largesses. The letter states that in the church at Rome "there are forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolytes, fifty-two exorcists, readers and door-keepers, above fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress, all of whom are supported by the grace and lovingkindness of the Master" (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* vi. 43. 11; Loeb ed., vol. 2, p. 119).

5. *the Bishop and Persecution*. In times of persecution the leaders of the church became not infrequently veritable heroes in guiding the people, counseling them in their

struggle against harsh civil authority, and setting an example of fortitude and courage. Concerning later bishops who, having survived the persecution of Galerius and Diocletian, were assembled at Nicaea for the great council of A.D. 325, the church historian Theodoret remarks that they “looked like an assembled army of martyrs” (*Ecclesiastical History* i. 6; *NPNF*, 2d series, vol. 3, p. 43). Bishops were there who had lost their right eye, which, for some, had been burned out with a hot iron; whose limbs had been crippled by various kinds of tortures; or whose right arm had perhaps been torn from its socket. This type of steadfastness under persecution, and the leadership it demonstrated, enhanced the power of the officials of the church.

6. *The Decline of the “Pneumatikoi.”* There was a negative cause for the increase in power on the part of the official church leaders. This was the decline in the effectiveness and influence for good of the *pneumatikoi*, the men of the spiritual gifts. It cannot now be determined whether the decline came more from deterioration within the group or from pressure on the part of aggressive church officers, who may have felt interference with their executive functions on the part of men who traced the origin of their powers and gifts to the Holy Spirit Himself. Both factors doubtless worked together to produce the decline.

The decay among the men of the gifts is suggested as early as the time of the Didache, previously referred to. This document warns the believers what to do “if the teacher himself be perverted and teach another doctrine.” The apostle [missionary] is to be received, “but let him not stay more than one day, or if need be a second as well; but if he stay three days, he is a false prophet. . . . If he ask for money, he is a false prophet. . . . Not everyone who speaks in a spirit is a prophet. Every prophet who teaches the truth, if he do not what he teaches, is a false prophet. . . . Whosoever shall say in a spirit, ‘Give me money, or something else,’ you shall not listen to him” (11; Loeb ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 325, 327). It is scarcely to be thought that such warnings would be uttered without a cause—the deterioration of the men of the Spirit.

The same situation is revealed in a sort of novel, produced probably in Rome, by Hermas, reputedly a brother of Pius, leader of the church in Rome about mid-second century. His writing, called *The Shepherd*, or *Pastor*, purports to be the visions and admonitions of one who claimed the gift of prophecy. It had high standing among 2d and 3d century Christians; there were those who pressed a claim for it to be included in the canon of the New Testament.

While Hermas claimed to be a prophet of God, he did not hesitate to point out the falsity of some who in his day were claiming to have spiritual gifts. For instance, “he who sits on the chair is a false prophet. And he, the false prophet, not having the power of a divine Spirit in him, answers them according to their inquiries, and according to their wicked desires, and fills their souls with expectations, according to their own wishes. . . . He who inquires of a false prophet in regard to any action is an idolater, and devoid of the truth, and foolish” (*The Pastor of Hermas* ii, Commandment xi; *ANF*, vol. 2, p. 27).

Then follows a discussion of the qualifications of a true prophet, and a comparison with the characteristics of a false prophet. Again: “They praise themselves as having wisdom, and desire to become teachers, although destitute of sense. On account, therefore, of this loftiness of mind, many become vain, exalting themselves” (*ibid.* iii, Similitude ix, 22; *ANF*, vol. 2, p. 51, 52). In contrast, Hermas says of the true teachers: “And they who believed from the eighth mountain, where were the many fountains, and

where all the creatures of God drank of the fountains, were the following: apostles, and teachers, who preached to the whole world, and who taught solemnly and purely the word of the Lord, and did not at all fall into evil desires, but walked always in righteousness and truth, according as they had received the Holy Spirit. Such persons, therefore, shall enter in with the angels” (*ibid.* 25; *ANF*, vol. 2, pp. 51, 52). A tribute is paid to the bishops: “Bishops given to hospitality, who always gladly received into their houses the servants of God, without dissimulation. And the bishops never failed to protect, by their service, the widows, and those who were in want, and always maintained a holy conversation” (*ibid.* 27; *ANF*, vol. 2, p. 52).

On the basis of the foregoing evidence, the 2d century is to be understood as the time when the effectiveness and influence of the men of the spiritual gifts were steadily declining, owing to abuses among their number and to the rising power and influence of the elected officers, especially the chief or presiding elder. This function of overseer was becoming so emphasized that the bishop developed as a distinct kind of ecclesiastical official. *The Pastor of Hermas* is to be understood as an effort on the part of someone in the church to reestablish the authority of the gift of prophecy. But the effort was vain. With the eclipse of the spiritual gifts and the taking over in the church of all authority by the regular officials, there came a decline in the spiritual strength and doctrinal purity of the early church.

There was another reaction against the decline of the *pneumatikoi*, in terms of a reform movement called Montanism (see p. 52). But the Montanists went to extremes, and fell under the condemnation of the church. Therefore their influence was hurtful to the cause of the men of the spiritual gifts, and worked rather to hasten their deterioration.

IX. From Ordinances to Sacraments

Baptism.—Baptism is the first ordinance that greets the reader of the gospel record. It was practiced by John the Baptist and by the disciples under the guidance of Jesus Christ, who was Himself baptized, and it was administered by the later apostles under the Great Commission.

But baptism has a more ancient history. Bathing was practiced upon those who were placed by the priests under a regimen of cleansing. In later Jewish times, at least, these ablutions were performed by immersion (see Mishnah *Mikwaoth*, Soncino ed. of the Talmud, pp. 423–462). Also, proselytes to the Jewish faith underwent a baptism by immersion as they were brought into the church of the Israelites. The Essenes seem likewise to have laid emphasis on ceremonial washings.

Therefore when John the Baptist came preaching his message of repentance, it was natural that he should offer a laving ceremony to those who responded to his challenging message of repentance. Much of his preaching took place in rural areas, indeed in the “wilderness,” where there were few people dwelling. When the people came to John in repentance, confessing their sins, he led them into the river Jordan.

Jesus Himself submitted to baptism at the hand of His cousin John, not in repentance for His own sins, for He had none, but in connection with His work as Redeemer. It was His “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15), to enter into every step of Christian experience, not for His own salvation but for that of the world. By entering into this ordinance Himself, Christ provided his followers with an example, and at the same time

in His own person He united the ordinance with the fact of salvation. Here also for the first time the gift of the Holy Spirit accompanied the rite of baptism.

After He began His public work, Jesus Himself did not baptize; His disciples performed this rite. The practice of baptism became a standard institution in the Christian church, and has continued ever since to be a means of initiating new members into the church, either at infancy, at an age of accountability, or at adulthood, according to the differing practices of various groups of Christians at different times.

That the baptism of John was not enough for those who became outright followers of Christ is evidenced by the fact that Paul rebaptized some who came to him at Ephesus, who had been baptized only with John's baptism, and, as Paul discovered, knew nothing of the Holy Spirit. He instructed them further in the Christian way, explained to them concerning the Holy Spirit, and rebaptized them. Thereupon they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues (Acts 19:1–7).

Jesus, in His Great Commission to His disciples, commanded them to baptize converts in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But baptism is frequently recorded as having been administered in the name of Jesus, as the central figure of the unfolding plan of salvation. This does not mean that the regular baptismal formula of the commission was not used; it means that the name of Jesus was emphasized in the work of the gospel. The baptism was by immersion, and from the early records, such as the baptism of the Ethiopian at the hands of Philip, and of Cornelius of Caesarea at the hands of Peter, it was a simple ceremony without any elaboration of ritual. In every recorded case of baptism, instruction was given before the rite was administered.

However, the church had not proceeded very far past the apostolic age until marked changes came into the rite of baptism. Not only was an elaboration introduced in connection with the administration of baptism, but its meaning and even the form of the ordinance underwent a change. By the middle of the 2d century, the writer of the *Didache* suggests that only living—that is, running—water be used for the baptism; and if baptism in either running or still water is not feasible, he suggests that pouring the water upon the head of the candidate is permissible (*Didache* 7). Here is a change in the understanding of the significance of the institution, because pouring never could represent properly the death to the old man of sin or the rising to newness of life that immersion portrays, as called for by Paul (Rom. 6:3, 4). The *Didache* also calls for trine immersion, apparently an elaboration that early became attached to the ceremony. Tertullian, about A.D. 225, speaks of the trine immersion of his day as an “amplifier pledge” of the baptismal vow, and accompanies his assertion with a description of a most elaborate baptismal ceremony (*De Corona* 3; *ANF*, vol. 3, p. 94).

At about this same time there was taking place a far more significant change in the practice and meaning of baptism. Early in the 3d century Tertullian had maintained that there was no need for baptizing infants, because baptism was not necessary for their salvation. He preferred a baptism “when they have become able to know Christ” (*On Baptism* 18; *ANF*, vol. 3, p. 678). However, the very fact that he opposed baptism of infants indicates that it was being practiced at that time. Tertullian's younger contemporary, Origen (died c. 254), declared that baptizing children was a “tradition from the apostles” (*Commentary on Romans*, v. 9; Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 14, col. 1047). Almost at the same time Cyprian urged that baptism should not be withheld

from an infant “who approaches the more easily on this very account to the reception of the forgiveness of sins—that to him are remitted, not his own sins, but the sins of another” (Epistle 58, *To Fidus*; *ANF*, vol. 5, p. 354). Particularly in the West, this concept that baptism washes away original sin inherited from Adam became the dominant reason for giving the rite to infants. Baptism came to be considered a saving ordinance. Without the application of the baptismal waters, the sinner, it was believed, was damned. Thus baptism was changed from a simple, symbolical ordinance, with a deep inner spiritual significance, to a sacrament.

It had become the practice for the chief elder, as his office evolved into that of a monarchical bishop, to have the sole right of administering baptism or of authorizing its administration. As baptism became sacramental, it enhanced the power of the bishop as one who had a supernatural power not possessed by other Christians. The simultaneous development of the Lord’s Supper as a rite involving supernatural power (see below) also promoted this same trend in the elevation of the clergy. The bishop became a necessary agent in saving sinners; without his ministration there could be no salvation. This meant the re-establishment in the Christian church of a priesthood, an institution which had, however, become unnecessary with the inauguration of Jesus Christ as the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Thus there was unfolded a triple succession of errors: (1) the false doctrine of the inheritance of original guilt; (2) the perversion of baptism by changing the rite from a single immersion of an adult to a triple pouring of water upon the head of an infant; (3) the investing of baptism with sacramental significance, and the making of the bishop a sacramental priest—a travesty on the plan of salvation, a substitution for the priesthood of Christ, and an apostasy from the true Christian way. By the close of the 3d century this apostasy had become a fact in the church.

The Lord’s Supper.—A parallel development took place in the case of the Lord’s Supper. The fellowship meal was a commonplace among both Jews and pagans. The Hebrews were required to use the peace offerings in such a meal. The Passover supper was a meal whose elements were carefully prescribed, and that was eaten in the family group or in a group of friends who had come up together to Jerusalem for the feast. As the last Passover of Jesus’ ministry approached, He expressed a desire to eat it with His disciples (Luke 22:15). Arrangements were made for it, and on Thursday night of the crucifixion week, the eve, or beginning dark part, of the 14th of Nisan, Jesus Christ ate the Passover with His disciples (see Additional Notes on Matt. 26 Note 1).

Probably early in the ceremony Jesus washed His disciples’ feet. Later, He inaugurated the Lord’s Supper. Taking the flat, thin, unleavened loaf of the Jewish Passover supper and the flask containing the “fruit of the vine,” as the gospel writers invariably call the beverage of the supper, He shared these elements of the meal with His disciples. According to information provided by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 11:23–26), Christ instructed them to partake of the bread and the “fruit of the vine” as representative of His body, which was wounded unto death as He bore the sins of the world, and the blood that He shed in dying for men. These emblems were to show Christ’s death until he should return the second time.

However, abuses crept in. Within 25 years of Jesus’ death, apparently it had become a custom, at least at Corinth, for the members of the church to bring to their meeting food to eat and wine to drink (see 1 Cor. 11:20, 21). For clannishness and selfishness

manifested at these feasts, Paul rebukes the people. The feast accompanying the Lord's Supper was called the *agapē*, or love feast. Jude refers to it (v. 12) and at the same time indicates that there were adverse elements in the love feast. Doubtless, his and Paul's criticism of the love feast, and probably Christian feeling in general concerning the abuses, caused this feature of the rite to pass out of the experience of the church, and there was left the simple Lord's Supper. Early in the 2d century in the epistles of Ignatius (*To the Philadelphians* 4; *To the Smyrnaeans* 7, 8) the Greek word *eucharistia*, "thanksgiving," is used for the Lord's Supper. From this word is derived the English "eucharist," a technical term for the Lord's Supper.

With the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, still further developments appeared. As early as the 2d century the Didache called the Lord's Supper a sacrifice (14), and from the time of Gregory of Nyssa (*In Christi resurrectionem, Oratio I*) this expression becomes increasingly frequent. Thus the conviction grew that the Eucharist involved a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ.

Notice the transition: At first the Lord's Supper was a thanksgiving service, as the term "eucharist" clearly indicates. It was a memorial service, partaken of by those who believed they had already received the gift of salvation, for which they were manifesting their gratitude by partaking of the prescribed emblems. But gradually, through the steps indicated, the supper became a *means* of salvation, as a repeated sacrifice of the Lord. Thus the supper, like baptism, became a *saving* ordinance, and in the same way required an intercessor to administer it as a sacramental process. In the case of the Eucharist, as with baptism, the officiating intercessor was the bishop, who became a priest in the Old Testament sense or even almost the pagan sense. This shift from the supper as a recognition of salvation received to a ritual performed as a means of salvation, and from a thanksgiving service to a sacrament, was by no means an innocent development. It was an apostasy. Through this unauthorized and unscriptural change in the understanding of the nature of baptism and of the Lord's Supper, a Christian intercessory priesthood—a veritable contradiction in terms—became an ecclesiastical and sacramental necessity. Ambition for place, ever latent in human nature, made men in ecclesiastical authority all too eager to fill the necessity. A human priest in the Christian church became an accomplished fact by the middle of the 3d century.

X. Christian Worship

Nowhere in the New Testament is a Christian worship service described. There are hints in Acts 2 and 20, and in 1 Cor. 11 and 14, but for the program of worship, reference must be made to extra-Biblical sources.

Pliny and Christian Worship.—The earliest description given of a Christian worship service is from the pen of a pagan writer. Pliny the Younger was governor of Pontus, on the southern shore of the Black Sea. He had been appointed to the position by the emperor Trajan. Pliny is best known as a man of letters, who wrote such exquisite Latin that his epistles have been preserved. Among these is found an extensive correspondence with the emperor. Included is a letter he wrote describing his experience in Pontus with the rising sect of Christians (*Letters* x. 96), and telling the emperor what he was doing to stop the growth of the sect. In the course of his report he described a Christian worship service, using information he secured from some whom he had placed under arrest because they were accused of being followers of the Christ.

Christian Sources.—There also are two Christian sources that tell what happened when the Christians gathered to worship their Lord. One of these is the anonymous document *Didache*, already cited. While this does not give a sequence or program for a formal exercise of worship, it does give considerable information as to what Christians of the mid-second century were doing. The other source is Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (67), addressed to the reigning Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–161). This gives a clear, sequential description of Christian worship as it was conducted at that time in the city of Rome, which was probably similar to that conducted elsewhere.

As earlier stated, the Christians, being an illegal sect, could own no property, and met in the homes of members (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15) or in hired halls. The meetings, at least in times of persecution, were held early in the morning (Pliny), probably to avoid detection. The weekly meetings were designed primarily for church members or for those sincerely interested. In the early days there was probably very little open advertising of Christian meetings and no endeavor to have a general public gathering. Pliny describes the meetings for worship as held “on a certain fixed day” (*Letters* x. 96; Loeb ed., vol. 2, p. 403), without identifying the day.

The Order of Service.—The service was very simple, with a minimum of elaboration or formality. The meeting opened with congregational singing, doubtless using the psalms (Eph. 5:19), and probably chanting or reciting some sort of simple formulary of Christian belief, as suggested perhaps by such passages of Scripture as 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:11–13. Pliny reports that they “bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust” (*ibid.*). According to Justin Martyr there was a reading from the Scriptures, which by the 2d century included at least parts of the New Testament. This Scripture reading was evidently not merely a passage or two but rather lengthy excerpts. The need for this is easily understood when it is remembered that all copies of the Scriptures at that time were handmade, and comparatively few of the members of the church would have copies in their possession. The scriptural knowledge possessed by the rank and file of Christians would be gathered from what they heard read. The reading was followed by comments on the portions selected, by one appointed for the day—doubtless usually the chief elder, if he were present at that particular congregational meeting, or one of the associate elders. When the sermon was ended, the congregation rose together and prayed.

A comparison of this early Christian service with that of the Jewish synagogue (see Vol. V, pp. 57, 58) reveals such striking similarities that it is safe to conclude that in many respects the Christian order was patterned after the Jewish.

It appears from Pliny that after this part of the service had taken place the congregation was dismissed. After a brief recess only those reassembled who were baptized members of the church. These then celebrated the Lord's Supper. According to Justin Martyr, at this point offerings were taken.

To what extent the materials brought as offerings were used for the fellowship meal it is difficult to tell. It appears from 1 Cor. 11:18–22 that the members brought their own food to eat at the *agapē* preceding the Lord's Supper. Justin Martyr seems to hint that some of the materials brought as offerings were used in the Lord's Supper itself.

Portions of the bread and wine from the supper were taken to the sick; money, food, and clothing that had come in the offerings were distributed to the strangers, the poor,

and those in prison for their faith. The responsibilities for the distribution rested with the presiding elder.

It seems that for many years some, at least, of the Jewish Christians continued also to meet Sabbath after Sabbath in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 15:21). Understandably, they would be reluctant to separate themselves from their non-Christian brethren in Judaism.

Further elaborations of the Christian service of worship are found in later documents, as in Tertullian's writings and in the anonymous Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, all of the 3d century and later.

²

XI. Days of Observance

The Sabbath.—Neither the inspired writers of the New Testament nor the writers of the 2d century focus on the matter of the day for Christian worship. Paul indeed admonishes Jewish Christians not to forsake their assembling together (Heb. 10:25). However, at this point in his writings Paul does not refer to any particular day of observance.

Christ attended the synagogue while He was on earth (Matt. 13:54–58; Mark 1:21–29; 6:1–6; Luke 4:16–38). His presence in the synagogue on the Sabbath was an act of personal worship on His part, “his custom,” and not merely the seeking of an opportunity to instruct the Jews. This is evident from the whole tenor of His life and from the facts of the gospel record. It was not due to any disregard of the seventh-day Sabbath that Jesus did things displeasing to the Jewish leaders, such as healing the sick, and refusing to rebuke His disciples for gathering handfuls of grain, on the Sabbath. Rather it was in order to lead the Jewish people away from the unreasonable traditional practices that were making Sabbath observance a burden.

It is clear from the gospel record that Jesus Christ died just before sunset preceding the seventh-day Sabbath, rested in the grave over the Sabbath (DA 774), and rose early on the first day of the week. It was evidently in the divine plan that He should remain at rest in the grave over the Sabbath day of that last eventful week. While He was resting in the grave His followers were keeping the Sabbath “according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56).

Again and again it is mentioned of the apostle Paul that in the cities where he found himself in his missionary journeys he went to the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Doubtless he went there, not only to evangelize, but also to worship. On his First Missionary Journey, when he attended the synagogue on the Sabbath in Antioch of Pisidia, he spoke to the people there, and then found the Gentiles of the city requesting that he give them a service in the synagogue on the following Sabbath, which he did (Acts 13:14–16, 42–44). On the Second Missionary Journey, in Thessalonica, “Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them [the Jews], and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:2). In Corinth, where Paul spent eighteen months, he supported himself by working at his trade along with this fellow tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 3). It is impossible to think that Paul, living with Jews, labored with his hands on the seventh-day Sabbath while there. Rather it is recorded that he was “in

²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ac 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

the synagogue every sabbath” (v. 4) until, because of the opposition of the Jews to his evangelizing, he withdrew (v. 7). There is every reason to believe that Paul would continue to observe the Sabbath after his expulsion from the synagogue, as before.

The gospel writers know only the Sabbath day as weekly day of worship. John records of himself that he was in the Spirit on the “Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10). But the day over which Jesus Christ is Lord is the seventh-day Sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28). This is the Lord’s “holy day” (Isa. 58:13) and the Sabbath day of the Lord of the commandments (Ex. 20:10). Furthermore, the writer of the Gospel of John, who wrote the Revelation also, knows but one weekly holy day, the seventh-day Sabbath. The only other day John mentions is known by the simple title “first day of the week” (cf. John 5:1–9 and John 9:6–14 with John 20:1, 19). Since John wrote the Gospel about the same time as, or perhaps after, the Revelation, he had ample opportunity to give to the first day of the week a special title, or even to say that it should be especially observed by Christians. This he did not do. The very fact that the New Testament writers did not discuss the question of which day to keep is the best evidence possible that there was no question in their minds. Christians kept the seventh-day Sabbath during the time of the apostles. As ample evidence shows, many of them kept it for centuries.

The Annual Sabbaths.—After Christ died upon the cross, certain elements in the requirements in the law of Moses ceased to be operative. This is clearly foretold in Dan. 9:24–27, where it is prophesied that “in the midst of the week he [the Messiah] shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” When the veil of the Temple was rent from top to bottom at the moment Christ died upon the cross, the Lord indicated thereby that the way to the true, the heavenly, sanctuary was open through the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sacrifices that had been brought daily by the Hebrew people need no longer be offered (Matt. 27:50, 51).

At the Jerusalem Council Paul fought out the question of what should be required of the Gentile converts to Christianity, and won the case for a glorious Christian liberty (Acts 15). However, as already pointed out, this became a serious controversy in the church, and Paul had to fight his battle again and again. In his Galatian epistle he lays down the dictum plainly, under inspiration, that salvation cannot come by the works of the law (Gal. 2:16).

Paul also warned the Galatians against the observance of days. “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years” (Gal. 4:10), is his mournful accusation. Whether he had in mind pagan ceremonies or Jewish holydays he did not say. Possibly it was both. There can be no question, however, as to what he meant concerning observance of days in the Colossian letter when he counseled, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come” (Col. 2:16, 17). Here he made it clear that the days of celebration that were typical of certain phases in the work of Christ and in the Christian experience to follow, were abolished as required observances with the coming of the Lord at His first advent. Paul spoke only of the “shadow” sabbaths, without further defining differences among sabbaths. However, Paul knew perfectly well the distinction made by Moses, found in Lev. 23:37, 38: “These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: *beside* the sabbaths of the Lord, and *beside* your gifts, and *beside* all your vows, and

beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord.” Here are plainly pointed out two kinds of sabbaths: (1) the weekly Sabbath, belonging peculiarly to the Lord, the observance of which is commanded in the eternal moral law of Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:8–11); (2) the annual ceremonial sabbaths: two sabbaths related to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the sabbath of Pentecost, the sabbath of the Feast of the Trumpets, the sabbath of the Day of Atonement, and two sabbaths connected with the Feast of Tabernacles. These annual sabbaths are described in Lev. 23. That they were specifically called sabbaths is clear from v. 11.

Therefore it must be concluded that there were certain performances abrogated at the cross:

1. The sacrifices of various kinds that were offered as part of the unfolding of the plan of atonement for the Hebrews.
2. Circumcision, a tribal sign administered before the age of accountability upon males of the Hebrew tribe, and upon male proselytes. This rite had to give way at the first advent of the Lord, because after Christ came there was no longer a tribe of people representing Christ. The family of Christ is made up of individuals drawn from every nation and from among men of every condition (Gal. 3:28, 29).
3. The annual feasts, with their ceremonial sabbaths, “a shadow” of the things of Christ to come, no longer required after the inauguration of the Christian church on earth.

However, just as the disciples did not fully understand that they need no longer remain connected with the Jewish church after the resurrection, or that they need no longer bring any animal sacrifices, so they evidently did not fully understand that the annual sabbaths were abolished at the cross. Not only is there evidence that the Christians of the book of Acts used these annual sabbaths as calendrical data, for gauging their days of travel and their appointments; there is a hint that some of the apostles were still participating, in a degree, in the ceremonies of the annual sabbaths. Thus Paul did not find it best to stop at Ephesus at the close of his Third Missionary Journey, for he felt that he must hasten on to Jerusalem in order to be there for the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he would tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8). On the other hand, in the admonition he inserted in 1 Cor. 5:8, “Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,” he was evidently not talking about an actual observance of the feast of the Passover.

Easter.—However, the keeping of Passover and Pentecost, with a changed emphasis, became embedded in the practices of the Christian church. This provided the basis for a serious controversy in the church of the 2d, 3d, and 4th centuries. There emerged a sect, principally in the East who were called the Quarto-decimans. The word is of Latin origin and means literally, “Fourteenthers.” These Christians insisted that the day of Christ’s crucifixion must be celebrated annually in the spring by special observances, and always on the day corresponding to the one upon which Christ died. This day was the 14th of Nisan, hence the name “Fourteenthers.” Thus they celebrated annually the same day the Jews observed as the Passover, but for a reason entirely different from that of the Jews, and without the particular ceremonies attaching to the Jewish Passover. However, Christian observance of the 14th of Nisan meant that they would be in their Christian meetings on the same day the Jews would be in their synagogues celebrating their feast. As a result of persecutions by the Jews, and the serious controversy within the church

over continuance of Jewish rites, there developed, particularly in the West, a feeling against having any celebration in the Christian church come at the same time as a Jewish festival.

This reaction crystallized into a definite movement in the city of Rome about the time of the second Jewish war, in the reign of the emperor Hadrian, that is, about A.D. 130. The leader of the church at Rome at this time, occupying in simplicity an office later elaborated into the papacy, insisted that the Christian church must celebrate annually, not the crucifixion, but the resurrection of Christ, and that this annual celebration must fall always on the first day of the week, because that was the day of the resurrection. From this grew the practice of having an annual spring festival of the resurrection.

About A.D. 150 it was merely a matter of quiet discussion between East and West. But at the close of the 2d century Victor, the head of the church at Rome, insisted that all the churches must line up with the practice of the church at Rome, no longer celebrating the crucifixion but the resurrection, and avoiding meeting on the same day as the Jews by having the spring celebration of the Christians fall on the first day of the week, commonly called Sunday. So intense did Victor become in the matter that an attempt was made to excommunicate all the churches that would not line up with the Roman practice. When there was vigorous protest against this, the excommunication was withdrawn. But from then on the practice of celebrating the resurrection on Sunday in the spring became fixed in the Christian church, and eventually developed into the celebration now popularly called Easter.

Sunday.—Apparently, this annual celebration of the resurrection on the first day of the week played a part in the establishment of weekly worship on Sunday. The first indubitable evidence of regular Sunday worship is found in the writings of Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 155), who describes Christian meetings as taking place on the morning of “the day of the Sun” (*First Apology* 67; *ANF*, vol. 1, p. 186). The sect of astrologers was already giving recognition to the sun on the first day of the week of their weekly cycle, and the Mithraists probably by this time were using Sunday for the special worship of Mithra. How much inducement there was for the Christians to set up a day for celebrating the triumphant resurrection of Christ on the same day as the sun was being worshiped is now impossible to know. Some inducement, some borrowing, there must have been. In any case, by the middle of the 2d century Sunday was a weekly observance of many Christians, particularly at Rome.

This was by no means a keeping of Sunday as a sabbath. After the morning service Christians seem to have gone about their regular duties. It was apparently some time before the church sought to make Sunday into a sabbath. Tertullian, about A.D. 225, suggested avoiding worldly matters on Sunday, but the first record of a serious attempt in this direction was not made until the 4th century after Christ.

Thus there is no need to look in Scripture for the origin of Sunday. It came into the Christian church about a half century after the last of the apostles had died. Apparently it was the astrologers of the ancient East who first gave to the days of the week the names of certain pagan deities such as the sun, the moon, and Saturn. Historians describe this as the astrological week. This method of marking time slowly became popular among the Roman people. Evidences of such a week are found in the records of the wars of the Romans in the 6th decade before Christ, where the day Saturn is mentioned; in the ruins of the cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii; and in the writings of the Christian Justin

Martyr, about A.D. 150, who speaks of Christians worshipping “on the day of the Sun” (*First Apology* 67; Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 6, col. 429). See on Dan. 7:25.

At the same time the early church did not dispense with the Sabbath. Sabbath and Sunday were observed together for centuries, particularly in the East. Probably because Western Europe was evangelized largely from Rome, there is almost no evidence of Sabbath observance in that area. Sundaykeeping was the common practice wherever the influence of Rome extended.

Fast Days.—Besides these practices there grew up in the early church the observance of certain fast days. These are mentioned in the Didache (8) as the “fourth of the sabbaths” and the preparation, that is, Wednesday and Friday. Christians were admonished not to fast on the second and fifth days of the week—Monday and Thursday were Jewish fast days. Wednesday was supposedly the day on which Judas sold Christ, and Friday was the day of His crucifixion and burial.

XII. Divisive and Competing Sects

To the Jews, Christianity was a “heresy” (Acts 24:14). Just so, Christianity had its heresies, and the apostles warned against these, either as current dangers or as dangers to be guarded against in the future (cf. 1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1).

The Montanists.—The Montanists were a sect whose spiritual objectives were of a very high order. The reason for the rise of the sect is to be found in the decline of the influence of the *pneumatikoi*, the men of the spiritual gifts. Evidences for the deterioration among these men have already been presented. Montanus was a man of strong spiritual influence who began preaching a message of reform in the province of Phrygia. He claimed for himself and his immediate associates the gifts of the Spirit, particularly the spirit of prophecy. They preached a revival and reformation, challenging the church to lay aside the worldliness that the Montanists realized had taken possession already in the subapostolic age.

Filled with reforming zeal, the sect appears to have spread rapidly. It seems to have gained the interest and attention of Hippolytus, who was leader of the stricter group in the church at Rome in the early part of the 3d century. Some gauge of the success of Montanism may be found in the fact that Tertullian, the great Latin writer and leader of the church of North Africa, accepted Montanism and entered wholeheartedly into its reforming spirit.

The Montanists used Paul’s terminology to describe themselves as well as those who opposed them. They called themselves the *pneumatikoi* and their opponents the *psuchikoi*. They condemned second marriages, considering wedlock a spiritual union and expecting this union to be renewed after death. They insisted that all who were guilty of crimes be expelled from the church. They imposed rigid fasts, advocated celibacy, praised extravagantly those who had gone into martyrdom, and even encouraged the experience, holding it unlawful to flee from it in time of persecution. The Christian experience was to them not only the result of a miraculous beginning but a miracle constantly repeated; for them, nothing that arose out of natural living or normal processes of mental and spiritual development counted for Christian progress. They seem to have believed that the development of religious experience in the total community was to go through four stages: (1) natural religion, or the innate concept of God; (2) the religion of the Old Testament; (3) the incarnation of Christ and the gospel He demonstrated; (4) the

coming of the Paraclete with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, and particularly, with the coming of the gifts of the Spirit in Montanus. Thus they believed that their own particular experience was to mark the culminating experience of the church, and that the perfection of their message in the church would bring about its triumph on earth, at the second coming of Jesus Christ their Lord. This second advent they expected very soon after their rise and the propagation of their message.

The sect was at the beginning, and not infrequently afterward, called the Phrygian heresy. It was still in existence in the 5th century. Its impact on Christendom modified somewhat certain of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Montanist views reappeared in several different manifestations among the sects of the Middle Ages.

Partly because of their firm belief in the indwelling dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit, and partly because of opposition to them and their work by the administrative authorities in the church, the Montanists were critical of the growing Catholic view that the church consists of the bishops. Tertullian said, “‘The Church,’ it is true, will forgive sins: but (it will be) the Church of the Spirit, by means of a spiritual man; not the Church which consists of a number of bishops” (*On Modesty* 21; *ANF*, vol. 4, p. 100).

The Ebionites.—Attention has been called to the severe division that sprang up in the apostolic church between two groups: (1) Jewish Christians who insisted that all in the church, whether Jew or Gentile, should follow the law of Moses; (2) Jewish Christians like Paul, and the large majority of the Gentile converts who accepted Paul’s teaching and welcomed the decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The latter held that the Gentiles should accept salvation through Jesus Christ by faith, and were under no necessity of paying any attention to Jewish ritual. As the number of Gentiles in the Christian church increased, and the Jewish Christians tended to become a minority, those who were particularly zealous of the law became self-conscious as a group. They formed one or more sects, occupying in thought and practice the boundary area between Christianity and Judaism. The Ebionites are spoken of by Christian writers as the chief, if not the only, one of these Jewish-Christian groups.

The name of the sect was from a Hebrew word meaning “poor,” and may have been a term applied at first to Christians in general, as Epiphanius insists. Later it was used to designate Jewish Christians (Origen *Against Celsus* ii. 1). It is entirely possible that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to hold the Jewish Christians, who were willing to listen to Paul, faithful to the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and High Priest, in contradistinction to a group of Jewish Christians who insisted on retaining connection with the Jewish priesthood and rituals. If so, the Epistle to the Hebrews might well have signalized a split between the two types of Jewish Christians, with the result that the Ebionites crystallized into a legalistic and ritualistic sect, dependent upon the preservation of the external forms of Judaism. Schaff describes the movement as “a Judaizing, pseudo-Petrine Christianity,” or “a Christianizing Judaism” (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, p. 429).

The Ebionites must have been for the most part Pharisees. They were the natural successors of the Judaizers, whom Paul so vigorously opposed, as revealed in his Epistle to the Galatians. They accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah, the son of David, but only as a man, like Moses and David, and as the product, by natural generation, of the union of Joseph and Mary. According to their belief, He became conscious of His Messianic status at His baptism by John, at which time a divine spirit was given to Him. This teaching the

19th-century Unitarians recognized as similar to their customary beliefs concerning Jesus. Therefore some of them said that the Ebionites were the true early Christians, and that the early Christian movement was Unitarian. The Ebionite understanding that at His baptism the human Jesus received a divine spirit may constitute them the progenitors of later adoptionism (see Vol. V. pp. 912, 913).

They insisted upon maintaining circumcision and the whole ritual law of Moses as necessary to men's salvation. Eusebius notes that the Ebionites observed both the Sabbath and the Lord's day, Sunday (*Ecclesiastical History* iii. 27. 5). Inevitably, the Ebionites classified Paul as an apostate and a heretic. Some even maintained that Paul was a non-Jewish heathen, converted to Judaism, from which he fell away in later life from impure motives. They expected a soon return of Christ, to introduce a millennial reign of glory on earth, with a restored earthly Jerusalem as its seat.

Certain evidences indicate Gnostic tendencies among the Ebionites. These are probably traceable to an Ebionite group of far less influence and reputation than the main body, a class that represented a curious mingling of Jewish-Christian and Gnostic teachings.

The Ebionites are not known after the 4th century.

The Nazarenes.—This sect is not mentioned by the early writers in the Christian church, but only by men of the 4th and 5th centuries, such as Epiphanius, Jerome, and Augustine. These speak of the Nazarenes as a Jewish-Christian sect, represented by the Christians who fled to Pella at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (see Epiphanius *Against Heresies* i. 2, Heresy xxix. 7). They are said to have believed in the universal obligation of the law and to have denounced Paul as a transgressor. However, in contrast with the Ebionites, they seem to have accepted Jesus Christ as the Son of God in the unique sense.

Although it is difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between the Nazarenes and the Ebionites, the Nazarenes may have stood somewhat closer to orthodox Christianity than did the Ebionites.

Gnostics.—What is known of Gnosticism is gained largely from early Christian writers who were hostile to it. Such men as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Origen wrote against it because they saw in it teachings dangerous to Christianity. However, there have been found recently among the Dead Sea scrolls, documents that are thought by some scholars to contain evidences of early Jewish Gnostic thought. An even more direct discovery bearing on Gnosticism was made at Chenoboscium (Nag Hammadi) in Egypt, in 1946, where a library of Gnostic works constituting almost 1,000 pages of papyri was discovered. When fully published, this collection should greatly increase our detailed knowledge concerning Gnosticism.

Actually there was no Gnostic cult, but only Gnostic cults, under leaders with a following sometimes small, sometimes large. It was not a movement so much as a way of thinking. It had no over-all organization, and little consciousness concerning itself. Apparently it became a problem to the leaders of Christianity in the latter years of the apostolic age, and was still to be reckoned with in the closing years of the 3d century. See Vol. V, pp. 912, 913.

The Old Testament speaks of a *knowledge* of God (see Jer. 9:23, 24), but this is not a speculative knowledge. Rather it is an acquaintance with God resulting from an acceptance by faith of that which He reveals concerning Himself. Similarly the New

Testament also knows a spiritual gnosis, or “knowledge,” but it is no abstract philosophy. It is first of all practical: a spiritual knowledge of God, based on His own revelations and working in the experience of the Christians. “To know” may be taken as the theme of the Gospel of John. The apostle stresses the knowledge of God and records Jesus’ statement that to know God and His Son is life eternal (John 17:3). John stresses the reality of Jesus, and the joy of fellowship in the knowledge of Him, in terms of actually seeing and touching the Lord (1 John 1:1–7).

To Paul, knowing Christ is a simple fact of experience, available to all. But there is also a deeper wisdom, the privilege of the mature, “perfect” Christian, which in turn develops perfection. “We speak,” he says, “the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom . . . : which none of the princes of this world knew” (1 Cor. 2:6–8). There is a “word of knowledge,” a gift of the Spirit, concerning which Paul speaks (1 Cor. 12:8). For instance, the Jerusalem Council had ruled that the Gentile Christians should avoid any contact with idols, even to abstaining from the use of food offered to them. Paul points out that those of mature knowledge will understand that the heathen gods are spirits of devils, and that the idols set up to represent them are nothing. Therefore, it is a matter of no moment whether food has been offered to idols or not, and such food might be eaten except that its use would distress the conscience of the scrupulous (1 Cor. 8).

Besides the practical everyday knowledge of God essential to Christian experience and the deeper insight of the “perfect,” there is false gnosis, which the leaders of the church are to avoid, and to help their people to avoid (1 Cor. 3:20, 21).

There are then two kinds of knowledge, the *gnōsis alēthinē*, the true knowledge; and the *gnōsis pseudōnumos*, false knowledge. These are to be distinguished, because one leads to salvation, and the other to deception and damnation. The true knowledge (gnosis) submits to the authority of Scripture and is a kind of developed, perfected faith.

The false gnosis was pretentious and supercilious, claiming to be intellectual and quite beyond the reach of the vulgar. It propagated itself, not by logical proofs, but by asserting its intuitional authority. Having set forth its ideas, it then attempted to systematize them and to make of them a sequential way of thinking concerning the spiritual world.

From what is known of ancient Gnosticism, it can be seen that its roots struck deep and were widespread and various. Several theories of its origin have been proposed, but it is probably best seen as a product of the religious syncretism that was such a characteristic feature of the Hellenistic world. Its debt to Oriental thinking is apparent in its pronounced dualism, which set forth a perpetual struggle between light and darkness. In this, Gnosticism showed a parallel to Parsiism, which in turn was rooted in the older Zoroastrianism. Gnosticism’s contempt for the corporeal and material is reminiscent of certain features of Platonism and of the older nature philosophies of Greece. The Judaism of the Maccabean and early Christian periods had in it strong speculative elements, which tended to move away from the delimitations of authoritative Scripture. Jewish Essenism and cabalism seem to have had some relationship to Gnosticism. As Gnosticism overran the boundaries of Christian thought it made use of the Christian Scriptures and borrowed Christian terminology to clothe Gnostic modes of thought.

With these complex backgrounds and relationships, and the spiritual and intellectual environments in which Gnosticism arose, there inevitably resulted a wide variety in the Gnostic system (if system it can be called), with strange combinations of compatibilities

and repulsions. There were forms of heathen Gnosticism. There was a Gnosticism in which heathenism and Christianity sought to combine. There were combinations of heathenism and Judaism. Some types of Christian Gnosticism exhibited themselves as anti-Judaistic, and other types as antiheathen. Gnosticism was a speculative attempt at a philosophic method of explaining the unseen world; of accounting for the perplexities and frustrations of life; and of offering some sort of hope for a successful fruition to the whole program of existence.

It is difficult to know which Gnostic ideas were held in particular sections and which were generally professed. It is almost as difficult to find a common denominator applicable at once to all forms of Gnosticism, as for all forms of Hinduism or of Christianity. But the following ideas seem to have been representative:

1. Back of everything that might be known or imagined was a supreme god, a divine spirit. This god was a completely spiritual, noncorporeal essence. Some Gnostics indeed taught that their god was without essence or person. They applied to the concept such terms as *abussos*, “abyss,” and *buthos*, “depth.”
2. From this supreme god there were said to have proceeded, through uncountable ages, a succession of emanations, called *aiōnes*, aeons, which were expressions of the originating principle and served to make it less incomprehensible. Taken all together, these emerging emanations were called the *Plērōma*, “fullness.”
3. All of this to which the divine essence was giving expression contained in perfection the divine principle of Light. But there was also a principle of Darkness, contesting with the Light, seeking to find a place in the universe of Light, and expecting eventually to conquer it. If such a thing were to happen, it would be an unimaginable eclipse of all things. Finally one of the aeons fell from the Pleroma.
4. Out of this appalling situation there resulted the creation of matter from the mingling of the fallen aeon with the lower world of darkness. The matter was formless, shapeless, chaotic, impregnated with darkness and therefore evil. The Demiurge, an almost unconscious cosmic force, identified by some Gnostics with the Jehovah of the Old Testament, gave form to this evil matter, and the material world resulted. The world, then, being material, was essentially evil, and was ruled by a more or less mechanical force.
5. The fall of the aeon and the formation of an evil world necessitated an act of salvation. This was undertaken by another aeon, identified as Christ. He descended to the level of the imperfect world, united temporarily with the man Jesus, probably at His baptism, and remained with Him until shortly before His death. The Christ-aeon accomplished the work of salvation by rescuing the fallen aeon, gathering out the light from the darkness of this world and revealing through Jesus hidden knowledge (gnosis) by which men may be set free from darkness and attain the sphere of light.

The Gnostic view of Jesus varied. Some taught as outlined above. Others declared that He had no material body at all, but that He was only an appearance. Consequently these are known as Docetists (Gr. *dokeō*, “to seem”).

Some Gnostics taught that through the work of Christ, matter would be freed from darkness; others, that matter would be conquered and disappear, the spirits of men being

liberated to be reabsorbed into the *buthos* or to become free spirits in the noncorporeal universe.

There were many forms of Christian Gnosticism, under a like number of leaders. Cerinthus was a Gnostic contemporary with the apostle John, whom John is said to have disliked particularly (see p. 36). The Docetists (see p. 58), against whom John seems unquestionably to be writing, were a serious problem to orthodox Christianity. Basilides, although later than the apostle Paul, presented a teaching similar to that against which the apostle wrote in his letter to the Colossians. Tatian, the composer of the first harmony of the Gospels, was a 2d-century Gnostic. Saturninus and Valentinus were troublesome Gnostics in the 2d century, as were Manes and Bardesanes in the 3d. A Gnostic group called Ophites is combated in the writings of Origen. By A.D. 200, some 65 different forms of Gnosticism were identifiable.

These Gnostic thinkers made free use of Scripture, interpreting it to suit their theories. They gathered up traditions that had grown up in the church and bent them to their purposes. They borrowed one another's writings, and built upon writings of any preceding thinkers they found useful. They used contemporary Jewish speculative writings, besides borrowing frankly from heathen philosophies, both contemporary and earlier.

The Gnostic way of thinking made an impact upon Christianity during the formative years of the church, and therefore influenced it greatly. By its speculations and distortions Gnosticism stimulated Christian thought to resist it and compelled Christian thinkers to seek to crystallize a theology. The Gospel of John must be considered an attempt at an early theology, probably written to resist nascent Gnosticism. Origen, however, is the first Christian writer to set down a fairly systematic theology.

In a parallel way, Gnosticism stimulated the Christian church to accelerate its formation of an authoritative organization, to develop a sacerdotal hierarchy, and to reach a measure of agreement regarding the canon. Its emphasis upon the spirits in the unseen world undoubtedly strengthened the Christian church in its borrowing of pagan ideas concerning the conscious state of the dead. It is very likely that its hierarchy of spirits helped the church to develop its veneration of the saints. Gnosticism led the church into a speculative and highly allegorical method of interpreting the Bible, to say nothing of causing Christianity to embrace tradition as a companion authority to Scripture. In so far as Gnosticism was anti-Judaistic, it accelerated anti-Judaism in the Christian church.

Because the Alexandrian school of Christian theology, under the leadership of Clement and Origen, used the term "Gnostic" in speaking of its way of Christian life and thought, stressing intuitive knowledge of divine matters, it has been thought that these leaders and their school were Gnostic in the sense of those just discussed. This was not true. The Alexandrian school was a speculative and philosophic school, heavily influenced by Platonism, and therefore known later as the Platonic school of Christianity. But the Alexandrian Christians fought the highly speculative Gnostics, rejected the theory of emanations and of the conquering darkness, and insisted upon the personality of God the Father, the deity of Jesus Christ, and, to a considerable extent, the personality of the Holy Spirit. They identified the Jehovah of the Old Testament, not with the Demiurge, but with the God of the New Testament, and gave to Scripture a place of supremacy. The Alexandrian school helped to develop the apostasy of the later centuries, but not through the channel of extreme Gnosticism.

The Docetists.—The Docetists (Gr. *Doketoī*, from the verb *dokeō*, “to seem,” “to appear”) were a group of Gnostics who held that the first coming of Christ to earth must be explained only as an “appearance.” Docetism taught the evil of matter, and particularly of the flesh, and therefore could not entertain the idea that the divine could form a union with the human as long as men were in the fleshly experience. As a movement the Docetists denied the humanity of Christ entirely, regarding what was seen as a mere vision. Thus it was directly opposed to the highly practical, activist Ebionism. Subtle in both thought and methods, Docetism was already a serious problem to Christian leaders in the time of Paul and John. Paul may have been dealing with some forms of Docetism in his epistle to the Colossians. It is impossible to doubt that John had the Docetists in mind when he wrote the challenge to his Christian brethren to recall that Jesus Christ could be touched and handled, and that He dwelt among men as a reality (1 John 1:1–3). Whatever later developments of heresy one includes under the term “antichrist,” certainly it must be recognized that John here is speaking primarily about the heresy of the Docetists.

Nicolaitans.—The name Nicolaitan is first used in the message to Ephesus in the book of Revelation (ch. 2:6), where the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” is made the counterpart in apostolic times of the “doctrine of Balaam,” which led the people of Israel into idolatry and fornication in the time of Moses (cf. Num. 24:1, 25; Rev. 2:14; PP 450–455). There is no history of this “doctrine,” but, in the message to Thyatira, the woman Jezebel is said to produce the same sort of evils (Rev. 2:20) as were attributed to the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.”

Later Christian writers concerned themselves with the term “Nicolaitans.” Irenaeus, the earliest to discuss it (*Against Heresies* i. 26), named as the founder of a sect of that name, Nicolas, one of the seven appointed to care for the material administration in the early church (Acts 6:1–3, 5), who is described as a “proselyte of Antioch.” Tertullian, Hilary, Gregory of Nyssa, and Epiphanius (*Against Heresies* i. 1, Heresy xxv) agreed in involving Nicolas, but with varying degrees of blame. One story is that Nicolas was extremely jealous of his beautiful wife, and to conquer this wicked feeling, he was led into the more repulsive sin of advocating promiscuity. From this, it is supposed that a segment of the church, apparently Judaeo-Christians, were led into sins parallel to those into which Balaam’s scheming led the Hebrews.

It must be noted that the very trespasses against which the Lord warned in His writings to Pergamos and Thyatira were among those forbidden by the Jerusalem Council: “that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, ... and from fornication” (Acts 15:29). It would seem that the Nicolaitan problem may have already emerged at the time of the council, perhaps in an incipient form. Facing similar issues at Corinth, Paul apparently did not see them as features of a definite movement (1 Cor. 5:1–6, 8; 10:5–11), although in ch. 10:8 he referred specifically to the experience of Israel with Balaam.

But Peter (2 Peter 2:9–22) and Jude (vs. 4–13) spoke bitterly of members of the Christian community who in early times were guilty in the love feasts (*agapē*), then connected with the Lord’s Supper, of the evils ascribed to the Nicolaitans. See on Rev. 2:6.

It is a strange coincidence that under the instigation of the Jews in the latter part of the 2d century and the early part of the 3d, charges of repulsive misconduct were brought against Christians in connection with their feasts. These charges, similar to those

attributed to the Nicolaitans, were leveled by the pagans (Origen *Against Celsus* vi. 27; Tertullian *Ad Nationes* i. 14) against the Christians. Aside from these accusations, there can hardly be a doubt that the transgressions attributed to the Nicolaitans existed within a certain group in the early church. The question to be answered concerns the extent to which the Nicolaitans constituted an organized, self-conscious movement. Concerning this there are only the hints given in the Bible references cited.

For the prophetic implications of the Nicolaitan experience in the churches of Pergamos and Thyatira see on Rev. 2:6, 14, 20.

XIII. Relation to the State

Tribal Religions.—It was in the nature of heathen religions to be essentially local or tribal. There were gods of the town and gods of the country, gods of the hills and gods of the valleys (1 Kings 20:22–30). As families, clans, and tribes formed what today would be called nations, certain gods or groups of gods came to be considered national deities.

The Romans clearly recognized this situation; as they expanded their empire, they were wise enough to apply the principle of toleration. Just as they permitted local peoples to retain as far as possible local forms of self-government, so they permitted them to retain their gods. They must, indeed, include in their lists of gods the chief gods of Rome, lest those gods be angry, and they must not be led by their religion to any restiveness against Roman rule. But with these stipulations they were allowed to continue their own forms of worship. In fact, the Romans, seeing an advantage in having more and more gods looking with favor upon Rome and its progress through the world, actually added foreign gods to their Pantheon.

The Roman and Jewish Religions.—When the Romans came in direct contact with the Jewish religion, particularly with the conquests of Pompey in the East, where he subjugated Syria and the Jews during the years 65–63 B.C., they encountered a religious problem. They were willing to tolerate the Jewish religion, but it was so completely intertwined with Jewish life, and so obviously made the Jews unwilling to yield to Roman domination, that they found toleration very difficult to maintain. Then too, the Romans could not understand the Jewish religion. Because the Jews talked about their God, but did not represent Him in any way, it seemed to the Romans that the Jewish religion was merely a creation of their own imagination. The Jews refused resolutely to have anything to do with the Roman gods, consenting only to pray for the Roman state. However, the Romans accepted this compromise and permitted the Jews to retain their worship. They installed Herod as king of the Jews. He was professedly Jewish, although only through a compulsion exerted upon his family by the Maccabean Jews years before.

There were a number of sects among the Jews (see Vol. V, pp. 51–53). These the Romans recognized as part of the Jewish religion, because the Jews included these sects in their religious economy. A sect like the Zealots was looked upon with suspicion because of its rebellious tendencies, and was frequently dealt with in a disciplinary way, but it was not outlawed except as a last resort.

Jewish Rejection of Christianity.—From the first, the Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus. After Christ had been put to death, they in turn rejected His followers and the church they formed. Hence Christianity had no legal position. There was therefore no logical way for the Romans to include Christ in their Pantheon, had they desired to do so. They could not accept Christianity through Jewish channels, because the Jews themselves repudiated it. Thus from the first it was an illegal religion with no status in law.

Roman Attitude to Christianity.—But there was something in Christian teachings that put it in a worse plight in the eyes of the Roman government. It was bad enough that the Jews were a proselyting people—the Romans found it necessary in the 2d century to pass laws forbidding Jews to proselyte. But the Jews did not claim to have a universal faith. They offered membership to the heathen on the basis of privilege. Not so Christianity. From the beginning Christianity claimed to be the only true religion, declared that it had a worldwide message, invited all to join who would meet the conditions of faith and rectitude, and insisted that it was universal in its scope. It gave no place to rivals, and was itself essentially intolerant of other cults. Hence Christianity presented itself to the Roman words as an imperial and conquering faith. It was at first scorned as ridiculous and then feared as a threat to Roman life.

The Jews had said, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). Not so with the Christians. They had only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, and they would not apply the term “Lord” to the Roman Caesar. They taught boldly that their Lord Christ would return as King of kings and Lord of lords and conquer the universe. Whether or not they said so plainly, it was implicit in their teaching that no earthly empire, even that of Rome, could stand in the presence of such a King (cf. Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45). The Roman Empire was a state, self-conscious and secure in its feeling. It had no successful competitors near its Mediterranean heartland. The state must be the chief concern of every citizen. The emperor, no matter how weak, silly, or evil he might be, personified the power and glory of the Roman state. On the part of such a state there could be no toleration of any sect, however sane, which had at the center of its teaching a belief in a supreme and divine King who would sometime overthrow all states, all dominions, and all powers.

Christianity challenged Roman society to a better way of life and thereby irritated that society. The ancient Romans, who understood the value of morality, had a stern ethic. But Christian morality was not of the Roman type, nor was it a development of the Roman thesis concerning values in life. Furthermore, the Romans of New Testament times were not living consistently with their older ethic. Therefore the life of the Christians was a constant rebuke to the Romans. They did not understand the Christian way of life; while they might have a grudging respect for what they did not understand, they hated it.

Christianity an Illicit Religion.—The Jews resented Christianity for numerous reasons. They feared lest the Christians would bring the wrath of the Romans down upon the Jews themselves. They hated the Christian’s Christ as a rival to their expected Messiah. They hated Christians the more because they took Gentiles into their fellowship. Hence, at every opportunity the Jews made trouble for the Christians, in so far as it was in their own power to persecute them in the land of Palestine, and elsewhere, by stirring up mobs to riot against the Christians. A number of instances of this are seen in the book of Acts. A document, *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, tells the same story of the city of Smyrna in the 2d century. In the 3d century Tertullian calls the Jewish synagogues “fountains of persecution” (*Scorpiace* x; *ANF*, vol. 3, p. 643).

Relationships being what they were, it is needless to search Roman law to find any decree against the Christians. No decree was needed. The Christians simply had no legal standing. In later years policies were developed against the Christians, and these policies became increasingly severe. The first attacks of Roman officialdom against the Christians were sporadic, the result, not of policy, but of whim or spite on the part of emperors.

Such were the persecutions levied against the Christians by Nero (c. A.D. 64) and Domitian (c. A.D. 95).

Roman Policies: Persecution From Whim.—The Roman historian Tacitus (*Annals* xv. 44; cf. Suetonius Nero vi. 16) recounts that justly or otherwise, Nero was blamed for burning the city of Rome. To divert the accusation from himself, he laid the blame at the door of the Christians. Numbers of the followers of Jesus were burned to death in the city of Rome, some being used as torches to light the night parties held in the gardens of Nero. The persecution doubtless extended somewhat through the provinces, although of this there is little record. As has been pointed out, Peter and Paul both perished in the city of Rome as a consequence of Nero's persecution (see pp. 30, 35).

The next persecution of the Christians at the hands of the Romans probably arose out of the spite of the emperor Domitian, an unstable and capricious man. He may have found Christians even in his own household. For this or other reasons, he turned upon the sect. It has already been noted that John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos during the reign of this emperor. Persecution under Domitian was probably not widespread nor too destructive, but it was a trouble to the church, and agony to those who suffered directly.

Exercise of Police Power.—The first clear-cut policy laid down by a Roman emperor in dealing with the Christians was enunciated by the emperor Trajan (A.D. 98–117). Trajan's friend and client, Pliny the Younger, was governor of Pontus, on the southern shore of the Black Sea. Pliny was deeply concerned over the spread of Christianity in his province. Temples were being neglected; merchants who dealt with sacrificial animals and materials for the temple worship were complaining that their business was suffering sadly. Pliny began therefore to deal with the Christians. When he found those who were willing to admit that they were members of that faith, he put them to death. To be sure of himself, he wrote to his friend the emperor and asked him to approve what he was doing. Pliny's letter is found in the standard collection of his writings (*Letters* x. 96). In this letter he gives an interesting description of Christian worship, already referred to, and then tells how he has been dealing with the Christians. *Supplicium*, the Roman sentence of death, has been executed upon them.

Trajan wrote back (Pliny *Letters* x. 97) approving what his representative had done in Pontus. But the emperor, generally a good and fair man, made this stipulation: No one should be put to death as a Christian unless he freely admitted that he was such, or unless enough witnesses were at hand to prove that he was. He must not be convicted on hearsay, but witnesses must appear against him, if their testimony was to stand. This policy was nothing more than the application of ordinary police powers to a problem of society. Trajan would not have called this persecution. The Christians, having no place in society, should be eliminated. If this were not done, they might develop into a real danger. Pliny reported that his method with the Christians was successful and that temple worship was being resumed.

This exercise of police power ordered by Trajan continued to be the policy of the Roman Empire in controlling Christianity for the next 150 years. It was a rather contemptuous policy, because the Roman government had not yet learned to take Christianity seriously as a movement. Under it Christians were persecuted during the reigns of the otherwise beneficent emperors Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–161) and Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180). These persecutions were carried out partly through mob

violence, oftentimes at the instigation of Jews, and partly through the pagan zeal of local governors, but with the knowledge and consent of the emperors.

Policy of Extermination.—In the middle of the 3d century the Roman policy changed, and for the worse. The government had learned that it must take seriously the spreading Christian movement. The emperor Philip the Arabian was said to have been a Christian (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* vi. 34). Toward the end of his short reign occurred the thousandth anniversary of the founding of the city of Rome, with a great resurgence of Roman patriotic feeling. Decius, the political rival of Philip and his successor at the crest of that wave, believed that the Christians had favored Philip. Therefore in the year A.D. 250 he inaugurated against them a policy of extermination. His severe and bloody persecution of the Christians was repeated by the emperor Valerian some seven or eight years later.

The Final Persecution.—By this time Christians had grown popular and had increased extraordinarily in number. This increase continued in the years of comparative peace that followed the persecution under Valerian, a peace that was terminated by the severe persecution under Diocletian and Galerius, beginning in the year A.D. 303 and continuing for ten years. This persecution marked another change of policy, in the sense that it represented an attempt at utter extermination; it was a case of war between bitter enemies. In that war the pagan empire lost.

The Policy of Toleration.—Constantine became emperor, and in A.D. 312 emerged as a friend of Christianity. The next year, when he issued his famous edict of toleration, Christianity found itself not only free to propagate but soon to become the exclusive religion of the empire. Constantine inaugurated the extraordinary new policy of union of church and state, the effect of which, although materially beneficial to the church, was more adverse spiritually than any persecution it had ever suffered.

Attitude of Church to State.—In an examination of the attitude of the church toward the state during the centuries when Christianity was an illicit religion, with no official standing in society, it must be remembered that the church was looking in those early years, not for an established place in the world, as was later taught by Origen and Augustine, but for a place in the kingdom of heaven, with Jesus Christ the Ruler. Therefore, the attitude of the Christians was one of patient endurance until Christ should rescue them.

Although Christian writers of the first few centuries are rarely found quoting Christ's significant statement, recorded in Matt. 22:21, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's," they applied the admonition in their relation with the empire. Paul exhorted the church in the same direction when he wrote: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. ... Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers" (Rom. 13:1-6). Peter says, "Honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17). Hence even when their religion was illegal, the Christians sought to live as good citizens in an inimical environment, applying in everyday living the ethics exhibited in the life of Jesus and contained in the example and teaching of the apostles. They gained a reputation for purity of life and for kindness to neighbors. While the government hated

and eventually dreaded Christianity more and more, the populace appreciated more and more the kind of life that Christianity represented. When haled into court, in response to the query of the judges the Christians often answered simply, "I am a Christian," and went to their death, with smiles amid their suffering, admonishing their fellow Christians to be faithful and appealing to pagan onlookers to walk with them in following their Lord and Master Jesus Christ. Christians who witnessed the death of such martyrs remained amazingly faithful, and Tertullian could say, "The blood of Christians is seed" (*Apology* 50; *ANF*, vol. 3, p. 55).

An innumerable host of Christian martyrs died thus because Christ had said, "Render ... unto God the things that are God's." Peter had said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29); "If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" (1 Peter 3:14); "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings. ... If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:12–16). Paul lived out in experience a consistent program for Christ; he listed for posterity a catalogue of his early sufferings for his Lord (2 Cor. 11:23–27).

Christians were, as a matter of principle, law-abiding citizens whenever the government asked of them that which was simple duty to do. But when the demands of government meant to deny Christ, to engage in false worship, and to live the kind of life that would have meant apostasy from Christian principle, they stood for the most part firmly for right, choosing to obey God rather than men, and to take flogging, imprisonment, or death in consequence. The issue was clear cut and the consequences certain: death here, but eternal life with Christ.

Separation of Church and State.—This was a philosophy of separation of church and state by necessity, with the thought that a degree of compliance with the pagan environment should be manifested under the necessity of the moment, until Christ should transport them to a new environment. Tertullian in the 3d century and Lactantius in the 4th insisted that the Christian church should keep separate from the pagan state.

But as Christ did not come, gradually a new philosophy developed. Christianity was becoming popular with the people and was gaining steadily in numbers. Christian teachers were listened to with more and more respect, and hope emerged that presently Christianity might take over the community of the world. Therefore, wherever possible, customs of the world were taken over and "baptized"—given Christian names and garbs. Care was taken to offend the state as little as possible. When the issues were clearly drawn, church leaders and those they led sought to stand firm. But where was the issue to be met? Expediency often postponed the moment of resistance, and more than once the issues were obscured by compromise. It can well be supposed that had the pagan Roman government been more complacent, Christianity would have followed such a program of compromise as to have learned to live content in a pagan environment, and perhaps eventually to have been completely modified by and absorbed into it. Fortunately for the church, the government remained a bitter enemy of the movement and Christianity was compelled to remain distinct, until Constantine led the Roman government into a surrender to the outward forms of Christianity.

XIV. The Impact of Tradition on the Church

The Apostles and Tradition.—The word “tradition” (Gr. *paradosis*) does not itself carry an adverse connotation. *Paradosis* means “that which is handed down.” Paul urged the Thessalonians to “hold the traditions . . . ye have been taught” (2 Thess. 2:15), and warned them not to fellowship with anyone who walks “not after the tradition which he received of us” (ch. 3:6). He gave expression to these sentiments because some had apparently come among the Thessalonians with a letter purporting to be from Paul, concerning the immediate advent of Christ (ch. 2:2). The “traditions” that Paul held praiseworthy were his own verbal teachings, by which the Thessalonians were to test any purported message from him, using also the letters recognizable as his own.

But Paul warned the Colossians not to be spoiled “through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). Peter reminded those converted to Christ through him that they were saved by the power of Christ from “vain conversation received by tradition” from their fathers (1 Peter 1:18).

Clearer yet is Christ’s condemnation of tradition. When challenged because He permitted His disciples to “transgress the tradition of the elders” (Matt. 15:2), Jesus set the authority of the law of God over against tradition and showed where the tradition of the Jews had led them to break God’s commandments (vs. 3–6). He quoted Isaiah (in the form preserved today in the LXX of Isa. 29:13) as speaking for the Lord, “In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (v. 9), and enunciated the dictum, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Matt. 15:13). He laid it down plainly that the Scriptures “are they which testify of me” (John 5:39), and used the writings of the Old Testament to establish His Messiahship in talking with the disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:27, 44). Paul understood the Scriptures to be sufficient for salvation and for the building up of the Christian man (2 Tim. 3:15–17). John has a strong warning for anyone who should endeavor to take away from or add to the words of the book of Revelation, given to him by inspiration (Rev. 22:18, 19).

Scripture in a Subordinate Place.—Undoubtedly the misuse of Scripture by the Jews as they opposed Christianity, by the false prophets within the church, by heretics, and particularly by the Gnostics, somewhat weakened the faith of Christians in the authority of Scripture. By the early part of the 3d century Tertullian was writing that the Scriptures are not enough in meeting the attacks of heretics, because the heretics themselves use the Scriptures to support their views (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 14, 19). Irenaeus, bishop of Gaul, about A.D. 185 produced his remarkable work *Against Heresies*. In it he faces the same problem Tertullian met a few years later. As already pointed out, Irenaeus laid down the proposition that the truth of Christianity is to be found in the churches as founded by the apostles, who passed on the truth to the bishops who Irenaeus believes succeeded the apostles. This truth, “passed on,” he held to be tradition, insisting that this must be a norm of truth, since the heretics were using Scripture (*Against Heresies* iii. 1–4). In his essay (The Chaplet, *De Corona* 3, 4) Tertullian makes the most forthright possible claim for the authority of tradition: “Let us inquire, therefore, whether tradition, unless it be written, should not be admitted. Certainly, we shall say that it ought not to be admitted, if no cases of other practices which, without any written instrument, we maintain on the ground of tradition alone, and the countenance thereafter of custom, affords us any precedent. To deal with this matter briefly, I shall begin with baptism. When we are going to enter

the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel. Then, when we are taken up (as new-born children), we taste first of all a mixture of milk and honey, and from that day we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week. We take also, in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike. As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honours. We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord's day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to WhitSunday. We feel pained should any wine or bread, even though our own, be cast upon the ground. At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign.

"If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer. That reason will support tradition, and custom, and faith, you will either yourself perceive, or learn from some one who has. Meanwhile you will believe that there is some reason to which submission is due"

(*ANF*, vol. 3, pp. 94, 95).

Tradition Enthroned.—This is a most interesting argument. It is asserted that tradition must be accepted as authority for certain practices followed in the church of the early 3d century, for which, it is acknowledged, there is no authority in Scripture. Then it is claimed that these practices are authentic because the church is following them. Next, the authority of tradition is asserted because the church is doing them by a traditional authority. Tertullian's bold list of the things the church of his day was doing on the basis of tradition provides some idea of the extent to which the church had moved from the basis of Scripture by the 3d century.

Much more was claimed for tradition thereafter. The acceptance by the church of this extrascriptural authority opened the floodgates for the admission of an almost unending flood of unscriptural ritual and erroneous teaching. These have held the church in their grip not only throughout the Middle Ages but down to modern times, and not only in the older ritualistic churches but also to some degree in the more evangelical churches. It is still true, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Veneration of the Saints.—The doctrine of the conscious state of the dead and the everlasting punishing of the wicked in hell are found very early in Christian history. Memorial services at the graves of the martyrs quickly came to be followed by prayers *for* the martyrs, who were considered to be in a sort of purgatory. Then, as it was believed that the perfect saints had gone on to eternal bliss, prayers were offered *to* the saints, that they might intercede for those still on earth. The veneration of the saints, and later the worship of the virgin Mary, were logical consequences of a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the nature of man.

The Atonement.—The atonement was also misunderstood. There came to be attached to it an atmosphere of magic. The emblems of the Lord's Supper were endowed, in the thinking of the people, with a kind of magical power. Soon it was supposed that the presence of Christ in the emblems imparted to the partakers the power of Christ Himself. The teaching of the Real Presence, that Christ Himself is personally in the bread and the wine, developed next, and out of it there easily grew the doctrine of transubstantiation—that the bread and the wine become the actual body and blood of Christ, not in outward appearance but in inward nature. As already noted, the emblems had become a sacrifice,

whereby Christ was offered anew as the sin offering; the presbyters became priests, needed to perform the sacerdotal function of offering the Christ anew. See pp. 44, 45.

Baptism became a saving work to bring salvation to infants, who, it was believed, had inherited the guilt of their fathers. To administer this allegedly saving ordinance, a priesthood again was needed. Thus there was established, by a misunderstanding of the atonement and the rites that represented it, a human priesthood, which blasphemously took the place—in the belief of the people—of the priesthood of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary above.

A New Legalism and Asceticism.—With the development of anti-Judaism in the church there came, partly from a misunderstanding of certain statements of Paul (cf. 2 Peter 3:15, 16), a wave of antilegalism. This made the church, particularly in the West, willing to set aside the seventh-day Sabbath and to take a relaxed attitude toward other requirements of Scripture. This lasted in the church only long enough to do harm. It was succeeded by a kind of neolegalism, which brought the church back to an observance of festivals that took the place of the annual sabbaths of the Old Testament and to an observance of Sunday, the first day of the week, as a memorial of Christ's resurrection. Ritualistic trimmings were added to the ceremonies developed in the church, as seen in Tertullian's writings quoted previously, partly under the pressure of borrowings from paganism. From a misunderstanding of what Paul said in 1 Cor. 7, the church came to look upon celibacy as an experience of devotion, and various ascetical practices gave zealous Christians a new standard of zeal. Fasting became a necessity for salvation. Eventually enthusiasts, dissatisfied with the churches, fled to the desert and became hermits, practicing celibacy and other forms of asceticism. They became eventually so numerous that it was necessary to form them into communities. Thus monasticism, with its attendant evils, became an institution of the church.

Under the pressure of anti-Judaism the seventh-day Sabbath fell gradually into disrepute; even more quickly, the distinction between clean and unclean foods was given up completely. With the elaboration of ritual, with the change of the presbyters into priests, and with an over-all massive borrowing from paganism, Christianity so lost its original nature and complexion that had the apostles come back to life, they would scarcely have been able to recognize the system they helped to found. Christianity in its official structure and general nature became by A.D. 400 little more than a pagan mystery cult. Lessons of warning for the remnant church may be found in the experiences of the early church with the state with society.

XV. The Spread of the Gospel

The Church as a Missionary Enterprise.—A view has already been given, in telling of the later work of the apostles, of the extent of gospel preaching by the close of the first century. The records are obscure for the 2d century. There was a thriving Christian congregation in the Rhone Valley of present-day France by the last third of the 2d century. Christianity was prospering in the East at the same time. The opening of the 3d century revealed strong Christian movements in North Africa, and some Christianity in Spain and Britain. By the beginning of the 4th century churches were established along the Rhine. Incidental information in early Christian writings shows a gradual spread of Christianity, with the planting and sometimes the extinction of churches under persecution, and a society slowly beginning to become Christianized. By the time Christianity was legalized, Christians doubtless could be numbered by the millions.

Church buildings were in use from the 3d century on. That the churches were not established in the purity of apostolic Christianity, but with the nature and complexion of the apostasies into which the church had fallen, must be obvious. Water cannot rise higher than its source; new churches naturally followed the parent churches that had brought them into existence and nurtured them.

The Gospel Message in Extension.—But there is an arresting statement in the writings of the apostle Paul. He speaks of the “hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:23). Here is a strong suggestion that the progress of the missionary work of the church was not measured in the early years by the permanent churches that are known historically. It can well be believed that under the power of the Pentecostal Spirit, and in apostolic zeal and courage, the message of the gospel was quickly carried to the whole known world, and perhaps farther; and that although it did not everywhere result in the establishment of permanent Christian communities, it served the purpose of warning men that they should now turn to the Messiah, who had just been crucified, had risen, and had ascended to heaven, where He was carrying on His mediatorial work for all who would turn to Him. If so, this must be thought of as parallel to the warning message that is to be given to the entire world before the second coming of Christ (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 14:6–12), and which is now in progress.

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